Community Schools Impact on Student Outcomes

Evidence From California

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Executive Summary

Community schools are an evidence-based strategy rooted in partnerships between schools and local agencies. They aim to strengthen learning conditions and support the well-being of students, families, and communities through four core pillars of integrated student supports, expanded learning opportunities, collaborative leadership, and family engagement. Since 2021, California has made an unprecedented $4.1 billion investment in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP), establishing the nation's largest state-level community schools initiative. California's investment in community schools focuses on the state's highest-need schools and far exceeds any prior funding on community schools in the United States. In comparison, the Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) program, the primary federal initiative, allocated a total of $670 million over the past 17 years.

The state investment came at a critical time, as the COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered California's educational landscape, exacerbating long-standing challenges and creating new ones. Chronic absence rates surged to unprecedented levels; test score gaps widened; and student, staff, and educator mental health challenges intensified. These impacts were particularly severe in high-poverty schools and among historically marginalized student groups. Community schools offer a comprehensive approach to addressing these challenges by transforming how schools engage with students, families, and communities.

Community schools are more than just an approach to service delivery; they represent a fundamental shift from traditional factory model schooling toward a whole child, community-engaged approach. At their core, they are about good schools committed to investing in what matters to the community: rich learning opportunities for all students, strong teaching, meaningful family and community engagement and collaboration, a welcoming school climate, and necessary supports that address students' barriers to learning. Where historical disinvestment has occurred, they seek to redress inequities, rebuild trust, and repair relationships between communities and their public schools.

The CCSPP implementation grants provide both detailed frameworks and structured support at the state and regional levels while allowing for local adaptation—a balance that is critical to the community schools approach. The program is designed to transform the relationship between the assets and needs of communities and the education of their children, rather than simply adding services to traditional school models. The substantial program provides a unique opportunity to assess the extent to which large-scale support for community school implementation can improve student outcomes and provide more equitable opportunities to all students.

This study assesses the extent to which the CCSPP grants effectively reached high-need schools and evaluates the impact of community school practices induced and supported by the CCSPP implementation grants on student outcomes, including attendance, suspensions, and academic achievement. The study compares changes in these outcomes over time between schools that received CCSPP grants (treatment group) and a matched group of similar schools that did not (control group). Employing a matched difference-in-differences technique, the analyses focus on the divergence in student outcomes between these groups after grant implementation.

This method leverages the fact that these school groups exhibited similar characteristics and trends in outcomes before the grants and would be expected to continue parallel paths without the CCSPP intervention. The primary analysis, using publicly available administrative data from the California Department of Education on all California schools from 2018–19 to 2023–24, specifically excludes schools with prior federal community school grant experience to isolate the effect of the California initiative on schools that were new to the community school approaches, though patterns in FSCS districts are explored. This report focuses on the 458 schools in the first cohort of implementation grantees, as they are the only schools with a full year of student outcome data. We plan to extend the study to incorporate longer post-treatment timelines and additional cohorts and as data become available for subsequent years.

Key Findings

Our analyses of student outcomes following the first full year of CCSPP implementation for the first cohort of grantees reveal consistent positive impacts across multiple domains:

- **CCSPP implementation grants reached a diverse set of high-need schools across the state.** The program successfully distributed resources across varied school levels, geographic regions, and settings with differing levels of prior exposure to community school approaches, ensuring broad representation in the initial implementation cohort. The average school served in the first cohort had roughly 90% of students who were from low-income households, English learners, and/or in foster care. These students are identified as part of the unduplicated pupil count (UPC), a measure used in California to capture a school's concentration of historically underserved students.
- **Community school approaches significantly reduced chronic absence in the first year of implementation.** CCSPP schools demonstrated a meaningful reduction in chronic absence; this reduction was, on average, 30% greater than that experienced by similar matched comparison schools. Improvements in regular attendance were most pronounced in elementary schools, suggesting particularly strong early implementation of attendance-focused strategies at this level. Because of the scale of the grant program, the average reduction in chronic absence rates equates to more than 5,000 additional students attending school regularly in the first year.
- **CCSPP community schools achieved a notable reduction in suspension rates.** Implementation of community school approaches corresponded with a 15% reduction in average suspension rates. Reduced suspension rates were largest in secondary schools, where baseline suspension rates were higher and where restorative practices and improved school climate may have had the greatest impact on disciplinary outcomes.
- **CCSPP community schools improved student test scores.** Schools implementing community school approaches showed overall gains of 0.06 standard deviations in math compared to matched schools—roughly the equivalent of 43 additional days of learning. CCSPP community schools also showed larger-than-expected gains in English language arts (ELA) scores (0.05 standard deviations overall), equivalent to approximately 36 additional days of learning, though ELA effects were only statistically significant for some student subgroups. During this same time period, comparison schools showed declines in achievement in both subjects.

- **Gains were largest for historically underserved students.** While students from all backgrounds benefited from the community school investments, there were larger-than-average effects for Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The differential impacts for Black students translate to approximately 130 days of additional learning in math and 151 days in ELA, representing substantial acceleration in academic progress. Benefits for English learners equate to 58 and 72 days more of learning in math and ELA, respectively. For socioeconomically disadvantaged students, these impacts are roughly the equivalent of 58 additional days of learning in math and 43 days of learning in ELA. The larger effects observed among Black students and English learners suggest that the community schools approach may be particularly effective at addressing long-standing opportunity gaps and barriers to achievement that disproportionately affect these student populations. Black students in CCSPP community schools also experienced a reduction in chronic absence and suspensions at more than double the overall rates.
- **CCSPP community schools' test score improvements were most substantial in schools that made the greatest progress in reducing chronic absence.** Each standard deviation improvement in CCSPP school attendance was associated with a near doubling of the main effect on achievement. The significant interaction between regular attendance gains among grantees in predicting increased learning suggests the interconnected nature of attendance and academic performance, reflecting the holistic impacts of community school engagement strategies.

Implications and Future Directions

The substantial reductions in chronic absence observed among CCSPP implementation grantees are both statistically significant and practically meaningful, aligning with prior community schools research. Similarly, the emerging findings on reduced suspensions and improved test scores mirror patterns seen in other community schools initiatives, where impacts often strengthen over time. Multiple research studies show larger impacts as culture shifts and partnerships and practices deepen; thus, we might reasonably expect additional positive impacts of the CCSPP grants to emerge over a longer implementation time frame as schools more fully integrate the community schools approach and the technical assistance they receive from regional and state support systems to scale and improve.

Our analyses reveal that the impacts of the CCSPP on both achievement and attendance were strongest at the elementary level and that achievement gains were strongest for the schools that had made the most progress in reducing chronic absence. Although high schools and middle schools made meaningful gains in reducing suspension rates, the inconsistent impacts on attendance and achievement at the secondary level suggest a need for targeted supports to enhance community school implementation in secondary settings. At the secondary school level, traditional departmentalized structures that reduce opportunities for close relationships between teachers, students, and families may often present barriers to core community school practices such as deep family engagement and building strong relationships between students and staff.

The strong association between achievement gains and reductions in chronic absence may have several plausible explanations. First, improved attendance directly increases instructional time, providing students with more opportunities to engage with academic content and receive teacher support. The compounding effects of consistent attendance may be particularly important in mathematics, where content tends

to build sequentially and missed instruction can create significant learning gaps. Second, the specific integrated supports implemented through the community schools approach likely address underlying barriers that simultaneously affect both attendance and learning capacity. For example, improved access to health services may reduce illness-related absences while also enhancing students' physical readiness to learn. Similarly, mental health supports may reduce stress-related chronic absence while improving cognitive functioning and focus during instructional time. Third, improved family engagement—a core pillar of the community schools approach—may simultaneously strengthen parents' commitment to regular school attendance and their capacity to support learning at home. This dual impact could help explain why attendance improvements translate into achievement gains more in community schools. Finally, the cultural shift toward greater belonging and engagement fostered by the community schools approach may motivate students not only to attend school more regularly but also to participate more actively when present. This increased engagement may enhance the quality of students' learning experiences, not just the quantity of instructional time received.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing chronic absence not merely as a compliance issue but as a fundamental educational equity strategy with direct implications for academic outcomes. They also suggest that the most successful community schools may be those that effectively integrate attendance interventions with broader strategies to enhance student engagement, well-being, and learning supports.

Further research is needed to more comprehensively understand the impacts of California's historic investment in community schools. This includes examining a broader range of outcomes for Cohort 1 implementation grantees, such as school climate measures, teacher retention rates, student grade progression, and graduation rates, while also tracking these schools' progress over additional implementation years. As cohorts 2–4 advance in their implementation journeys, incorporating their experiences and outcomes into the analyses will provide a more complete picture of the initiative's effectiveness across diverse contexts.

One of the strong values of community schools is building a sense of responsive community, which is particularly important for families and children who have had negative experiences with public institutions. The initial positive findings presented here suggest a promising return on California's historic investment in community schools, indicating that new resources and approaches are helping to get children back to school, lessening the need for exclusionary discipline, and increasing the rate of learning, especially among students who have been historically underserved.

Introduction

Since 2021, California has invested $4.1 billion in the California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) to establish and expand community schools across the state. This unprecedented state commitment dramatically exceeds the federal Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) program's total grant allocation of $670 million over the past 17 years,[1] cementing California's position as the national leader in funding community schools.

Community schools represent an evidence-based strategy rooted in partnerships between the school community and local education agencies to strengthen learning conditions and support the well-being of students, families, and communities. Supports provided through community schools include mental health services, meals, health care, tutoring, after-school programming, and other services tailored to specific community needs.

This report aims to assess the early impacts of California's investment in community schools on critical student outcomes. Specifically, we examine how CCSPP-supported community schools are affecting chronic absence,[2] exclusionary discipline, and academic achievement. We also analyze the extent to which these grants reach California's highest-need schools to ensure resources are directed where they are most needed. By examining these key metrics, we provide insights into how the community schools approach is addressing some of the most pressing challenges facing California's education system.

The COVID-19 pandemic dramatically altered the educational landscape nationally and in California, exacerbating long-standing challenges and creating new ones. Chronic absence rates surged to unprecedented levels, and assessment data show substantial learning loss that has not yet been fully recovered, particularly in high-poverty schools and among historically marginalized student groups.[3] Moreover, students' mental health challenges have intensified, with increased rates of anxiety, depression, and trauma-related symptoms, potentially contributing to higher rates of behavioral incidents and rising suspension rates as students returned to classrooms after the peak of the pandemic.[4]

A key tool in California's approach to addressing both new and long-standing whole child challenges—which students experience inequitably—is the major investment in community schools across the state, particularly in high-need communities.

What Is a Community School?

Community schools are an evidence-based strategy in which students, families, educators, and community partners come together to organize in- and out-of-school resources in support of student success. They aim to improve learning conditions and support the well-being of students, families, and communities through four core pillars of integrated student supports, expanded learning opportunities, collaborative leadership, and family engagement. Although specific programs and services vary by local context, community schools focus on creating safe and engaging environments that foster academic, social, and emotional development while removing barriers to learning. These models also emphasize student growth and learning priorities, such as asset-based practices, restorative climates, and culturally responsive instruction. These principles are reinforced by proven strategies like community asset mapping, dedicated coordinators, and inclusive advisory councils, which help ensure that these approaches are tailored to each community's strengths and needs.

The Community Schools Forward project—a national collaboration of practitioners, researchers, and policy leaders—has identified six foundational practices as essential aspects of community schools: (1) expanded, enriched learning opportunities; (2) rigorous, community-connected classroom instruction; (3) a culture of belonging, safety, and care; (4) integrated systems of support; (5) powerful student and family engagement; and (6) collaborative leadership and shared power and voice.[5] From this foundation, and through continuous reflection and improvement, community schools work toward outcomes such as stronger school climate and discipline, improved attendance, deeper student and family engagement, greater stability in staffing and enrollment, academic growth and deeper learning, higher graduation rates, increased college and career readiness, and locally defined measures of success.[6]

Community schools are more than just a service delivery model; they represent a fundamental shift from factory model schooling toward a whole child, asset-based, community-engaged approach. At their core, community schools are about good schools committed to investing in what matters to the community: rich learning opportunities for all students, strong teaching, meaningful family and community engagement and collaboration, a welcoming school climate, and necessary supports that address students' barriers to learning. Where historical divestment has occurred, they seek to redress inequities, rebuild trust, and repair relationships between communities and their public schools.

Community schools are more than just a service delivery model; they represent a fundamental shift from factory model schooling toward a whole child, asset-based, community-engaged approach.

While this study examines traditional educational metrics—attendance, suspensions, and test scores—it is important to recognize that community schools aim to transform the entire educational experience for students and their families. A defining feature of the community schools approach is the flexibility that schools and districts have to respond to their unique contexts. By thoroughly understanding local assets and needs, often gathered through intentional assessments and close collaboration with members of the school community, schools tailor their strategies to reflect and build upon the strengths of their students, families, and communities. This adaptability ensures that community school practices are not one-size-fits-all but are instead grounded in equity and relevance to the communities they serve.

The Present Study

This study provides a first estimate of the student outcome impacts of community school implementation driven by the large-scale CCSPP grants in California. By analyzing the first wave of post-treatment statewide administrative data, we offer insights into how California's ambitious investment is translating into measurable changes for students, particularly those who have been historically underserved. The findings have important implications locally and nationally for policymakers, educators, and community partners as California and other states and districts continue to seek evidence-based approaches to providing quality educational resources in partnership with communities that are too often neglected.

Prior Research on Community Schools and Student Outcomes

A growing body of community schools research demonstrates positive outcomes for students and for schools, including improved student attendance, achievement, and school climate. While evidence of large-scale community school initiatives impacts is limited, a 2017 research review examined more than 143 studies estimating the efficacy of community school strategies and found that well-implemented community schools led to improvement in student and school outcomes that include the following:

- **Attendance.** Improvements in attendance and chronic absence are typically among the earliest outcomes observed for community schools. Studies showed a pattern of increased daily attendance rates and decreased chronic absence rates across many community school sites. Students who participated in expanded learning time programs, as well as students who reported increased engagement with school, showed some of the largest gains.
- **Academic Attainment.** As attendance improves, academic attainment gains typically follow. Studies showed a pattern of decreased dropout rates and increased high school graduation rates at many community schools.
- **Academic Achievement.** Progress in academic achievement may also follow improved attendance. Studies showed that students at many community schools made gains in grades and test scores—with math showing the strongest improvements—especially after their school fully implemented the strategy for several years.
- **School Climate and Discipline.** School climate plays an important role in supporting students' attendance and academic gains. Specifically, evidence from school climate surveys showed that students, families, and teachers reported readily available support at their community schools. Studies also showed that students at community schools reported positive peer and adult relationships, as well as improved attitudes toward and engagement with school. Studies of disciplinary results were more mixed, with fully implemented community schools often showing reduced disciplinary incidents and suspension rates.[7]

Recent studies of large-scale state and district community school initiatives with similarities to the California program reinforce the findings from the research review. These include evidence from Maryland and New York, the two states that have invested in community schools through their school funding formulas.

- **Maryland.** Community schools are included in the education funding formula through an entitlement grant program, which provided $369 million in 2025 for schools with 55% or more students living in poverty to employ community school staff and provide programmatic supports. In 2024, this translated into each qualifying school receiving $272,823 in personnel grants.[8] Recent research shows that community schools have made progress on school climate and attendance outcomes (including reductions in chronic absence).[9]

- **New York.** Since 2016, community schools have been included in the school funding formula through a set-aside for high-need districts (currently $250 million), along with state-funded technical assistance centers. In 2022, more than $117 million in state funding was allocated to 252 community schools in New York City, averaging $467,048 per school.[10] A rigorous RAND evaluation comparing New York City's 420 community schools to similar non-community schools showed reduced chronic absence and disciplinary rates and improved on-time grade progression and high school graduation.[11] A follow-up study confirmed community schools' impacts on reducing chronic absence and—after 3 years of implementation—improving math and language arts test scores.[12]

Taken together, these studies demonstrate a growing body of evidence to support the momentum for community schools nationwide. While implementation can vary widely when a strategy is scaled up, the evidence base on community schools paints an increasingly consistent picture of the outcomes that fully implemented community school initiatives can achieve. Attendance usually improves first, followed by academic gains, with school climate improvements playing a foundational supportive role.

While most research on community schools shows encouraging results overall, it is important to recognize that outcomes can vary across studies. Larger and more recent evaluations, especially those in settings with strong infrastructure and more mature implementation, consistently indicate better and significant benefits for students and communities. At the same time, some studies have found more modest or mixed effects, potentially reflecting differences in research design, local context, and implementation supports.[13] This variation emphasizes the importance of understanding how and under what conditions community schools are most effective so that future investments can build on the most promising practices. This study helps address this ongoing gap by providing new statewide evidence on the early outcomes of a large-scale investment in community schools, offering insights into both the scope of impact and the factors that supported its implementation.

California and Community Schools Context

Community schooling has long been touted as a powerful strategy to disrupt inequitable education systems and empower intergenerationally underresourced communities by coordinating efforts to mitigate the effects of racialized poverty. Edley and Darling-Hammond (2016) explain:

> At the heart of [the community school] model, the power to disrupt inequality comes from the extension of responsibility for student welfare and enrichment beyond traditional educational actors and organizations to the complex and interrelated systems that serve youth from low-income households and their families.[14]

The COVID-19 pandemic inflicted lasting harm on California's communities and schools and exacerbated preexisting disparities in educational outcomes between the state's highest-need schools and their more advantaged counterparts. Schools serving predominantly high unduplicated pupil count (UPC) populations[15]—concentrations of low-income students, English learners, and foster youth—have faced particularly severe challenges. In 2022, schools with 90% or higher UPC enrollments (the average profile for the first cohort of schools receiving California Community Schools Partnership Program [CCSPP] implementation grants) reported staggering chronic absence rates of 44% compared to just 12% in schools with less than 20% UPC. Even before the pandemic, these disparities were pronounced, with high-UPC schools experiencing chronic absence rates of 20% versus under 6% in low-UPC schools. Similar patterns emerged in academic achievement after COVID, where the average percentage of students meeting proficiency standards in high-UPC schools stood at 17% in math and 28% in English language arts in 2022, compared to 70% and 77%, respectively, in low-UPC schools.

These persistent and widening outcome disparities reflect the cumulative impact of systemic inequities in educational resources, opportunities, and supports available to students in different school contexts. It is precisely these systemic inequalities that the CCSPP seeks to address through a comprehensive, asset-based approach that transforms school culture, leverages community partnerships, and ensures that all students—particularly those from historically marginalized backgrounds—have access to the integrated supports they need to thrive academically, socially, and emotionally.

California's Historic Community School Grants

While California's investment in community school grants is relatively new, schools and districts throughout the state have a rich history of implementing this strategy. Starting in the 1990s, the Healthy Start grant program planted the seeds for the current investment in community schools.[16] Healthy Start provided funding for local education agencies (LEAs) and community partners to provide comprehensive, locally coordinated, school-linked services to children, youth, and families. The services included physical and mental health care, family support and education, academic support, violence prevention, youth development, and employment preparation.

The federal Full-Service Community Schools grant program has provided seed funding for a number of California community school initiatives, starting with the Los Angeles Education Partnership and the Lost Hills Union Elementary School District in 2018. Additional California grantees have included Hayward Unified and Pasadena Unified school districts (2020); El Rancho Unified, Lindsay Unified, and Washington Unified school districts (2022); and Cutler-Orosi Joint Unified School District, National University, and Oakland Promise (2023).

Finally, several California districts have invested local resources in community schools in partnership with county agencies, community-based organizations, and philanthropies. These include the Los Angeles Unified, Oakland Unified, Redwood City, San Francisco Unified, and West Contra Unified school districts.

These districts can serve as a source of inspiration and learning as a much larger portion of California schools begin to implement the community schools strategy. Many of these districts—especially those no longer receiving federal grants—have used state community school grant funding to strengthen and expand their existing community schools work.

California Community Schools Partnership Program

The California Department of Education defines a community school as "any school serving pre-Kindergarten through high school students using a 'whole-child' approach, with an integrated focus on academics, health and social services, youth and community development, and community engagement." The state-approved CCSPP framework builds on this definition by identifying four key areas of community schools implementation: (1) pillars or foundational practices of community schools; (2) key conditions for learning grounded in the science of learning and development; (3) cornerstone commitments to aspects of implementation, including shared decision-making; and (4) proven practices drawn from long-standing community school initiatives, including employing a community school coordinator.[17]

These four areas are further broken down into 16 total features, with which CCSPP grantees are expected to align their work and reporting of their work to ensure a comprehensive approach to whole child and community-grounded development (see Table 1). Overall, the features of the CCSPP framework serve as design anchors to ensure that the state's investment leads to transformative and sustainable systems change, rather than isolated service expansion.

In 2021, California passed a historic $3 billion investment in the CCSPP, followed by an additional $1.1 billion investment in 2022, for a total of $4.1 billion invested over the course of a decade.[18] The CCSPP provides funding through the 2031–32 fiscal year and has offered three grant types to qualifying LEAs and schools. LEAs that qualify to be considered for CCSPP grants are those with 50% or more of their enrolled students being unduplicated pupils—including students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, or foster youth. Additionally, these LEAs must have higher-than-state-average dropout, suspension, and expulsion rates, as well as higher rates of child homelessness, foster youth, or justice-involved youth.

Planning grants, offering up to $200,000 per LEA for up to 2 years of planning, were only available in fiscal years 2021–22 and 2022–23. Implementation grants provided between $150,000 and $500,000 annually for 5 years to help support or expand existing community school initiatives, with the first grants issued in summer 2022. Finally, starting in fiscal year 2025–26, extension grants are intended to offer up to $100,000 annually per site for 2 years after the implementation grant ends. The CCSPP also allocated approximately $200 million for technical assistance resources and coordination grants, including a statewide center to serve as the "coordinating hub" and a network of eight regional centers (led by county offices of education with support from local partners) to provide direct on-the-ground support to grantees within their region.[19]

Table 1. The "4 x 4" State-Approved Framework for CCSPP

The Four Pillars of Community Schools	The Four Key Conditions for Learning
1. Integrated student supports 2. Family and community engagement 3. Collaborative leadership and practices 4. Extended learning time and opportunities	1. Supportive environmental conditions that foster strong relationships and community 2. Productive instructional strategies that support motivation, competence, and self-directed learning 3. Social and emotional learning that fosters skills, habits, and mindsets that enable academic progress, efficacy, and productive behavior 4. System of supports that enable healthy development, respond to student needs, and address learning barriers
The Four Cornerstone Commitments	**The Four Proven Practices**
1. A commitment to assets-driven and strength-based practice 2. A commitment to racially just and restorative school climates 3. A commitment to powerful, culturally proficient, and relevant instruction 4. A commitment to shared decision-making and participatory practices	1. Community asset mapping and gap analysis 2. The community school coordinator 3. Site-based and local education agency–based advisory councils 4. Integrating and aligning with other relevant programs

Note: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program.
Source: California Department of Education. (2022). *California Community Schools Framework* (accessed 07/16/2025).

The first funding round in 2022 awarded planning grants to 192 LEAs and implementation grants to 76 LEAs serving 458 school sites. A second round of funding in 2023 awarded planning grants to 226 LEAs and implementation grants to 128 LEAs serving 570 school sites. A third round of funding in 2024 awarded implementation grants to 288 LEAs serving 995 school sites. A fourth and final round of funding in 2025 awarded implementation grants to 127 LEAs serving 470 school sites. In total, CCSPP grants are reaching 2,493 school sites—approximately 25% of California public schools.

The state prioritizes funding for applicant schools that serve 80% or more pupils who are from low-income households, English learners, or youth in foster care, along with several other competitive priorities. CCSPP grants can be used for a broad range of services, strategic planning, and sustainability efforts. Eligible expenses include community school coordinators, assets and needs assessments, service

coordination and provision, family and community engagement, collaborative leadership strategies, ongoing data collection and evaluation, and professional development on relevant topics such as trauma-informed practices. Funds may also be allocated to enhance instructional practices, including expanding and enriching curriculum through deeper learning approaches like project-based learning connected to local issues and organizations or creating advisory systems to ensure every student is known and supported. Together, these reflect the grant's flexibility to comprehensively meet local needs and ensure that each school community can design a model responsive to its unique context.

Because the annual per-site amount of implementation funding is scaled to enrollment size, over the 5-year grant period small schools (25–150 students) receive approximately $700,000 in total, while large schools exceeding 2,000 students qualify for up to $2.3 million in total funding. This graduated approach creates notable variations in per-pupil investment across school contexts. As shown in Table 2, in large-enrollment settings, the per-student allocation falls below $240, representing a highly cost-efficient intervention when considering the comprehensive services and supports the community schools model enables. Conversely, in very small schools with under 25 students, the per-student investment ranges from $2,970 to $7,130, which may reflect higher baseline costs required to establish and maintain core community school infrastructure, regardless of student population size. This funding structure acknowledges the economies of scale inherent in school operations while aiming to ensure that all grantee schools—regardless of enrollment—receive sufficient resources to implement the foundational features of the community schools approach.

Table 2. CCSPP Grant Amounts and Per-Student Costs, by School Size

Enrollment category	Annual grant amount		Total grant amount over 5 years	Amount per student per year
	Years 1–4	Year 5		
Very small (10–24 students)	$75,000	$56,500	$356,500	$2,970–$7,130
Small (25–150 students)	$150,000	$112,500	$712,500	$950–$5,700
Small/Medium (151–400 students)	$250,000	$187,500	$1,187,500	$590–$1,570
Medium (401–1,000 students)	$300,000	$225,000	$1,425,000	$290–$710
Medium/Large (1,001–2,000 students)	$400,000	$300,000	$1,900,000	$190–$380
Large (2,001 or more students)	$500,000	$375,000	$2,375,000	Under $240

Note: CCSPP = California Community School Partnership Program.

Source: California Department of Education. (2025). California State Board of Education July 2025 Agenda Item #13. (accessed 07/16/2025).

The CCSPP implementation grants are helping to expand the work of existing community school initiatives in the state, as well as starting up many new community schools. The $4.1 billion CCSPP is both historic and far-reaching. The decade-long, multicohort rollout creates an important opportunity to examine the outcomes of a major state investment in community schools. This study represents not just a grant program evaluation but also an opportunity to understand whether California's investment is yielding outcomes that align with and reinforce the existing national community schools evidence base.

In this study, we found that CCSPP grantees made significantly greater progress than similar comparison schools in reducing absences and exclusionary discipline practices while improving student achievement. CCSPP schools that exhibited average or larger progress in reducing absences were also the schools with the largest gains in student achievement. For both absences and achievement, we find the largest benefits were among Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. CCSPP grants successfully reached schools with some of the highest concentrations of minoritized students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students, and spanned across rural, urban, and suburban geographies.

In the sections that follow, we first describe the equitable targeting of the CCSPP grants in reaching diverse, high-need schools, then lay out our methods for assessing their impacts on student outcomes through increased community school approaches. We then share results across student outcomes—overall and by subgroups—including chronic absence, suspensions, and academic achievement. The report ends with a short descriptive analysis of potential explanations of exceptional successes along with implications for policy.

Who Are the CCSPP Grants Reaching?

The four rounds of California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation grants awarded since 2021–22 have reached many of the highest-need students in the state. In total, the 2,493 grant-receiving schools serve about 1.34 million students, which represents over 22% of California students. More than 4 out of every 10 high-need schools in the state (43%) are or will soon be supported by a CCSPP grant (see Table 3). An analysis of the demographic composition of CCSPP grantee schools reveals that they serve significantly higher concentrations of historically underserved student populations compared to the typical California public school.

Most notably, CCSPP grantee schools across all four funding cohorts have an average unduplicated pupil count (UPC)[20] of over 85%, substantially higher than the statewide average of 65%. This measure of concentrated student disadvantage—capturing students eligible for free or reduced-price meals, English learners, and foster youth—demonstrates that CCSPP resources are flowing where they are most needed.

CCSPP grantee schools also serve considerably higher proportions of English learners, with over 30% of students classified as English learners compared to approximately 20% statewide. Additionally, the racial composition of CCSPP schools reflects the concentration of economic disadvantages in historically marginalized communities, with roughly 35% more Hispanic students and roughly 85% more Black students in Cohort 1 schools than the average school in the state. When we focus on pre-grant student outcomes, the grant recipients had substantially higher rates of chronic absence, higher suspension rates, and lower shares of students meeting state standards on both math and English language art test scores than the state average.

The geographic distribution of CCSPP grantees across cohorts largely mirrors the overall distribution of schools across California's diverse regions, ensuring that both rural and urban communities benefit from these investments. Furthermore, the distribution across school levels (elementary, middle, and high schools) closely reflects the proportional makeup of California's K–12 education system. This balanced approach ensures that the community schools model is being implemented and tested across diverse grade-level configurations and developmental stages.

These patterns indicate that the CCSPP initiative is successfully targeting resources toward schools serving California's most vulnerable student populations while maintaining appropriate geographic and grade-level representation. By concentrating investments in communities with the highest levels of socioeconomic challenges, limited English proficiency, and racial disparities, the program is well-positioned to address long-standing educational inequities through the community schools approach.

Table 3. Number and Characteristics of CCSPP Grantees Prior to Grant Allocation (2021–22), Compared to State Averages

Characteristic	California	Cohort 1 (funded in 2022)	Cohort 2 (funded in 2023)	Cohort 3 (funded in 2024)	Cohort 4 (funded in 2025)
CCSPP award characteristics					
Amount awarded	N/A	$611.1 million	$750.5 million	$1.29 billion	$633.5 million
Number of LEAs	1,016	76	128	288	127
Number of schools	10,121	458	570	995	470
Schools with over 80% UPC	45%	90%	69%	78%	84%
Student characteristics					
Total enrollment	5.9 million	246,382	293,746	519,094	284,981
Average enrollment per school	580	538	515	525	613
Percentage of UPC students	65.4%	89.1%	85.1%	85.9%	86.8%
Percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students	59.8%	86.5%	83.7%	84.6%	85.3%
Percentage of English learners	21.1%	36.2%	29.7%	30.9%	33.5%
Percentage of White students	20.3%	8.3%	11.0%	11.9%	8.5%
Percentage of Asian students	6.9%	4.3%	4.3%	3.0%	2.8%
Percentage of Black students	4.6%	8.5%	7.3%	4.7%	5.2%
Percentage of Hispanic/Latino students	51.2%	70.1%	68.7%	72.9%	76.9%
Percentage of students of other race/ethnicity	17%	8.8%	8.7%	7.5%	6.6%
School characteristics					
Charter	12.8%	9.4%	15.6%	18.0%	10.3%
School level					
• Elementary	59.7%	62.0%	59.5%	58.7%	61.5%
• Middle	13.7%	14.2%	17.2%	13.4%	15.5%
• High	21.0%	20.3%	19.5%	23.9%	19.6%
• K–12	5.6%	3.5%	3.9%	4.4%	3.4%
Locale					
• City	41.1%	53.0%	39.4%	27.8%	35.3%
• Suburban	39.5%	25.6%	34.6%	40.1%	41.3%
• Town	7.1%	6.1%	13.5%	15.2%	11.4%
• Rural	12.4%	15.3%	12.5%	16.9%	12.1%

Characteristic	California	Cohort 1 (funded in 2022)	Cohort 2 (funded in 2023)	Cohort 3 (funded in 2024)	Cohort 4 (funded in 2025)
Student outcomes					
Chronic absence rate	34.1%	44.0%	41.7%	40.6%	41.5%
Suspension rate	3.0%	3.2%	3.7%	4.1%	4.2%
Math standards met	17.7%	11.8%	13.4%	13.0%	12.0%
ELA standards met	24.8%	19.0%	21.3%	21.3%	19.7%

Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. LEA = local education agency. UPC = unduplicated pupil count. ELA = English language arts. "Other race/ethnicity" includes students who are identified as Filipino, Native American/Alaska Native, and Two or More Races, as well as students who did not report their race/ethnicity. Implementation grant funds were awarded in the summer of the listed year. Student characteristics, school characteristics, and student outcomes data are based on the 2021–22 school year, before grant allocation to the first CCSPP cohort.

Sources: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files, the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files, and National Center for Education Statistics Education Demographic and Geographic Estimates locale data. CCSPP grantee information is retrieved from May 2022, May 2023, May 2024, May 2025, and July 2025 California State Board of Education meeting agendas.

Analytic Strategy for Assessing Impacts

The large investment California made toward community school implementation across the state provides a unique opportunity to assess the impacts of expanded community school approaches on student outcomes and take stock of whether and how those investments may be making a difference for schools and students. To evaluate the impact of community school practices induced and supported by California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) implementation grants, this study analyzes effects on student outcomes including attendance, suspensions, and academic achievement, all of which have been theoretically and empirically linked to community schools strategy. We estimate the impacts of supporting community school implementation by comparing changes in these outcomes over time between schools that received CCSPP grants and a matched group of similar schools that did not (see Appendix A for details on data and methodology).

This report focuses on Cohort 1 recipients because they are the only schools that have available post-grant student outcome data to explore potential impacts, as we treat 2023–24 as the first full year of implementation due to timing of fund distributions and community school coordinator hirings. Employing a difference-in-differences technique, these analyses focus on the divergence in student outcomes between these groups after grant implementation. This method leverages the fact that these two groups of schools exhibited similar characteristics and trends in outcomes before they received CCSPP grants and would be expected to continue parallel paths without the CCSPP intervention. The validity of the difference-in-differences approach relies on the parallel trends assumption, where in the absence of treatment, trends in the student outcomes follow similar trajectories in both CCSPP grantee and matched schools. We examined pre-treatment trends and found relatively consistent patterns between the two groups of schools prior to grant implementation (see Appendix B).

The primary analysis, using publicly available administrative data from the California Department of Education on all California schools from 2018–19 to 2023–24, intentionally excludes schools with prior federal community school grant experience to isolate the effect of the California initiative on schools that were new to community school approaches, though patterns among districts that had previously received Full-Service Community Schools grants are explored separately (see Appendix C).

To ensure a valid comparison, the study used a matched sample approach, pairing each grant-receiving school with a control school that had similar prior student outcomes, demographics, and school characteristics. By examining the differential change in outcomes after the grants and controlling for shifts in student populations, this research provides policymakers with evidence on whether the CCSPP grants led to better-than-expected improvements in student outcomes. We conducted a series of robustness checks to assess how stable the findings were to alternative matching strategies as well as checks for student sorting and for parallel trends in student outcomes prior to treatment, a key assumption to support the validity of our study's analytic approach.

Impacts of Community Schools on Student Outcomes

In the first full year of implementation of the California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) grants (2023–24), our analyses reveal consistent, positive impacts of community school strategies across multiple domains of student outcomes (see Table 4). Prior research on community school interventions and reports from CCSPP grant recipients on their early focus activities suggest attendance would be the first outcome to show substantial change, though we see promising early impacts on suspensions and test scores as well. Using matched comparison schools with similar pre-implementation characteristics and trends, we find that CCSPP schools demonstrated at least a 30% larger improvement in chronic absence rates (depending on student subgroup and school level) compared to similar schools.

CCSPP schools also demonstrated a significant decrease in suspension rates, with a reduction of roughly 15% (0.5 percentage point), and significantly improved standardized test scores in math (0.06 *SD*), roughly equivalent to 43 additional days of learning. While improvements in English language arts (ELA) were not statistically significant overall, they were notably significant for English learners (p <0.05) and for socioeconomically disadvantaged and Black students (p <0.10) (see Table 5). The following sections present details that expand on these findings, including examination of variance across and within subgroups and an exploration of features and contexts that relate to better observed outcomes.

Table 4. Summary of Results Across Student Outcomes

Variables	Chronic absence rate	Suspension rate	Math score (*z*)	ELA score (*z*)
CCSPP	-1.487*	-0.520*	0.057*	0.045
Standard error	(0.689)	(0.252)	(0.029)	(0.031)
Observations	1,704	1,704	5,251	5,243
R-squared	0.433	0.071	0.067	0.068
***N* of schools**	570	570	562	563

Notes: ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. ELA = English language arts. FE = fixed effects. All models include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). For test scores, grade fixed effects are also included, and observations represent grade cohorts within years. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Analysis excludes schools with prior exposure to community school approaches. Math and ELA scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

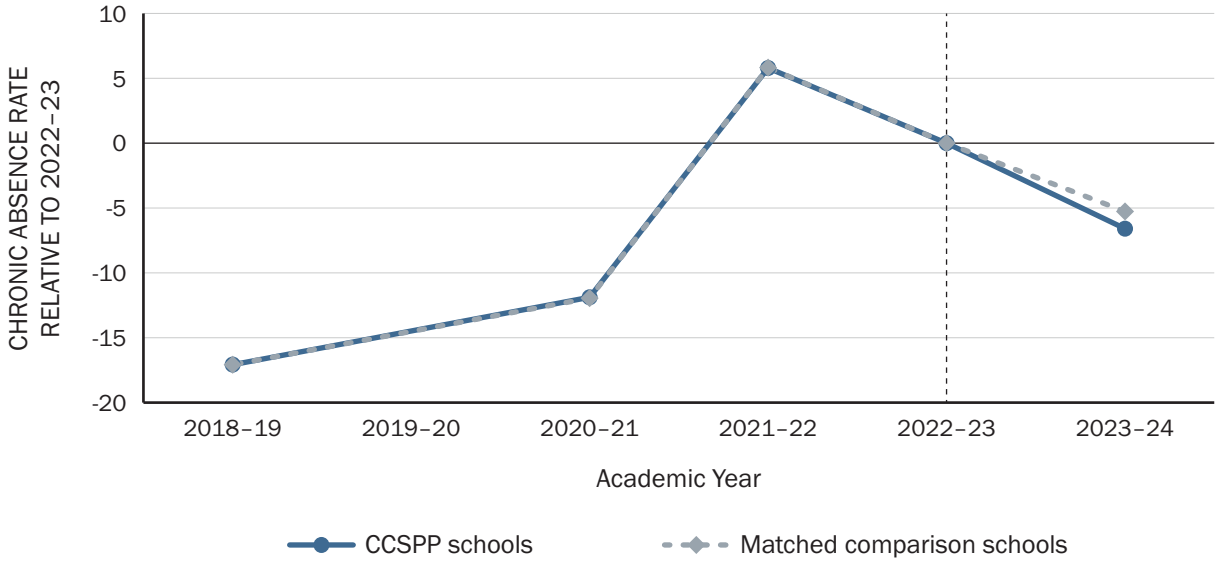
Chronic Absence Results

Overall, we estimate that community school approaches induced and supported by the CCSPP grants significantly reduced chronic absence rates by approximately 30% more (1.5 percentage points) in treated schools than equivalent untreated comparison schools. Average impacts among elementary school grantees were nearly twice as large (2.8 percentage points) as the overall impact estimate, and the largest improvements were among Black students in community schools (4.3 percentage points).

Prior to the pandemic, both grantees and matched comparisons had chronic absence levels of about 19% in 2018–19, which spiked to 42% in 2021–22 before declining to 36% in 2022–23. In the first full year of implementation, we start to see a significant divergence, with CCSPP schools recovering more rapidly than their matched comparison schools. In 2023–24, the average chronic absence rate in CCSPP schools was 29%, compared to 31% in matched comparison schools.

Figure 1 depicts the close tracking patterns in chronic absence for the sample. The chronic absence rates are indexed to 2022–23, meaning that the value is set to zero for that year, and values in other years represent the changes in chronic absence rates relative to 2022–23. As shown, the chronic absence rates of CCSPP grantees and matched comparisons have almost identical trends prior to the treatment but diverge after 2022–23, when CCSPP grantees implemented community school strategies and made greater gains in reducing chronic absence.

Figure 1. Trends in Chronic Absence Rates for Community Schools and Comparison Schools



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Chronic absence rates by group are modeled controlling for school characteristics (enrollment; percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless students, English learners, and youth in foster care; and racial/ethnic composition) and include school and year fixed effects. Adjusted chronic absences shown in this figure reflect levels relative to 2022–23, the baseline year when most schools were hiring community school coordinators and setting up for full implementation the next year. Due to limited in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2019–20 data are excluded.

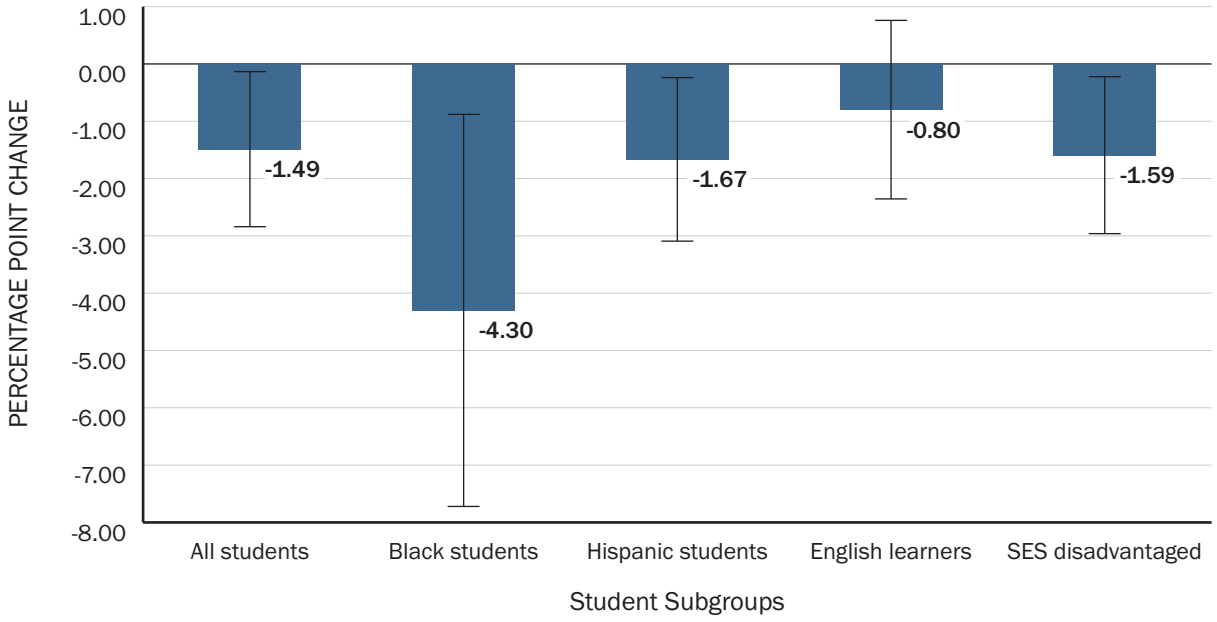
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Figure 2 shows the main effects across student subgroups from our fully specified model, and the coefficients can be roughly understood as the percentage point change in chronic absence rates in community schools above and beyond what would be expected in the absence of the intervention. The average CCSPP school significantly reduced chronic absence rates by 1.5 percentage points overall and by more than 4 percentage points for Black students. Figure 3 shows results across school types, with the largest impacts in elementary schools and in small schools.

These reductions in chronic absence are substantial, especially considering the scale of the intervention, as each percentage point reduction represents an additional student out of every 100 students who is no longer chronically absent. To provide a crude estimate of the scale of impact, if we assume a typical school enrollment of 600 students, a 2-percentage-point reduction in chronic absence rate translates to approximately 12 additional students attending school more regularly per school (0.02 * 600 = 12), or roughly 5,500 students across the first cohort. The impact can also be understood as a 30% larger improvement than similarly high-need schools in the state.

In order to measure the effects of changes in practice in community schools receiving the initial grants, we excluded grant recipients who had already received federal grants and had a track record as community schools from our primary analysis. However, in the 2023–24 school year, CCSPP schools in districts with prior exposure to the model through the Full-Service Community Schools grant program showed some of the largest year-over-year improvements in reducing chronic absence in the state (see Appendix C).

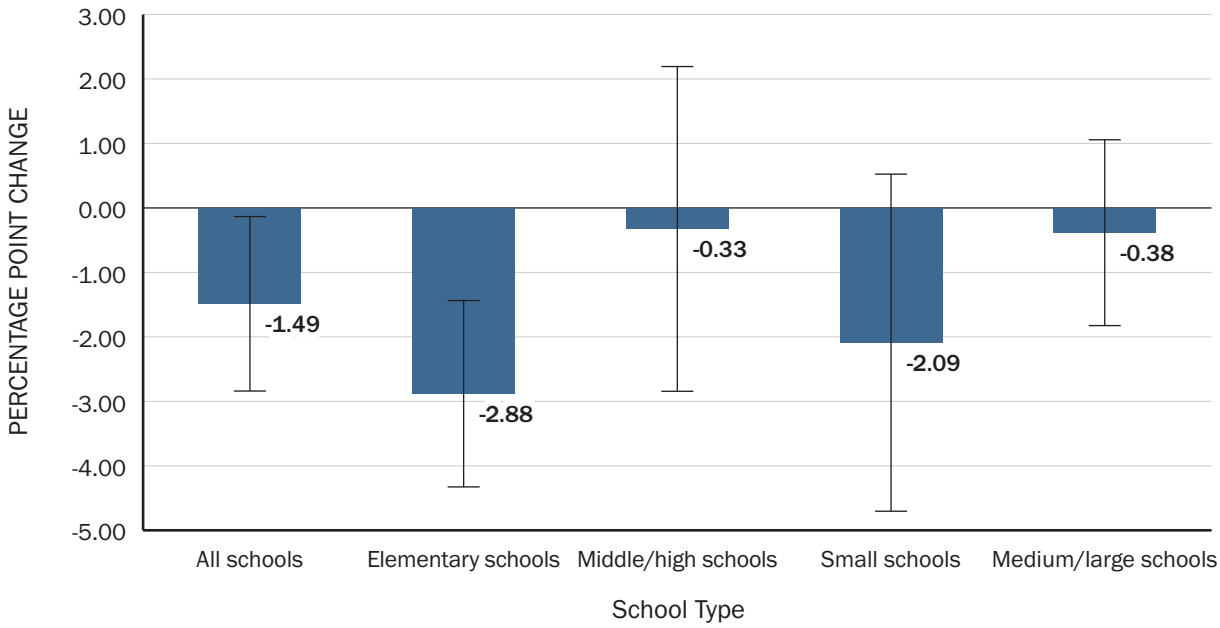
Figure 2. CCSPP Community School Effects on Chronic Absence Rates, by Student Group



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Figure 3. CCSPP Community School Effects on Chronic Absence Rates, by School Type



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

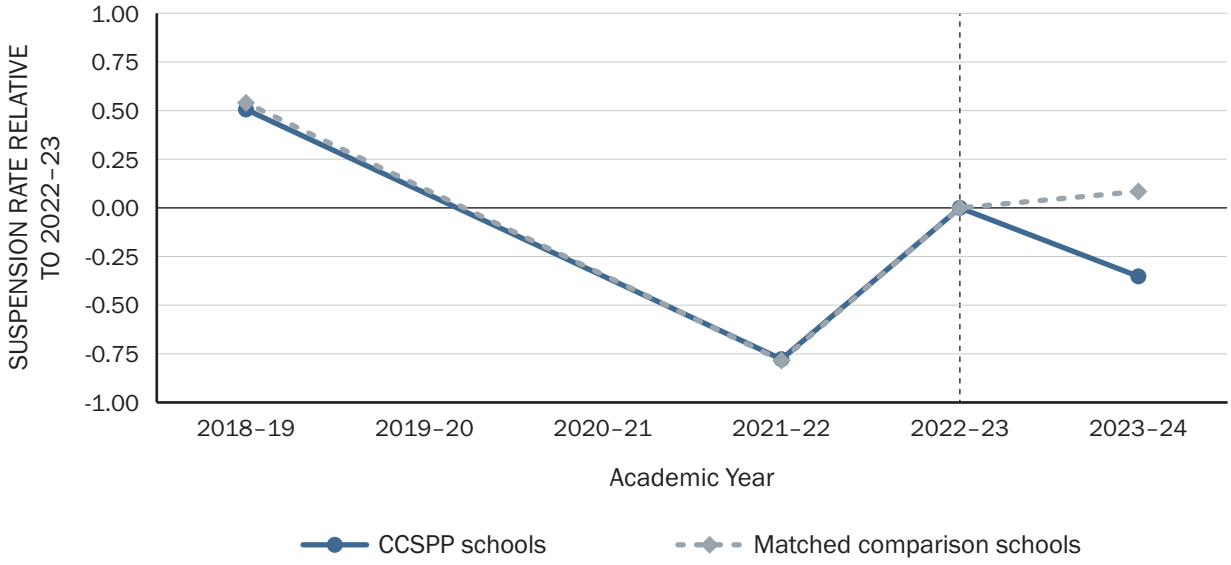
Suspension Results

The impact of community schools on students' experience of exclusionary discipline outcomes, specifically suspension rates, is also noteworthy. Suspension rates were measured as the percentage of students who were suspended for an aggregate total of 1 full day anytime during the school year. Our difference-in-differences analysis indicates that the implementation of community school approaches through CCSPP grants led to a significant reduction in suspension rates of 0.52, or roughly 15%.

The implementation of community school approaches through CCSPP grants led to a significant reduction in suspension rates of 0.52, or roughly 15%.

Figure 4 shows that suspension rates tracked closely between CCSPP and comparison schools prior to treatment, but that they diverged post treatment, where comparison schools saw slightly increased suspension rates and community schools experienced reduced suspension rates. To show the close tracking of prior trends, the rates in Figure 4 are indexed to 2022–23, meaning that the value is set to zero for that year, and values in other years represent the changes in suspension rates relative to 2022–23.

Figure 4. Trends in Predicted Suspension Rates (Indexed to 2022–23 Rates), by Treatment Status

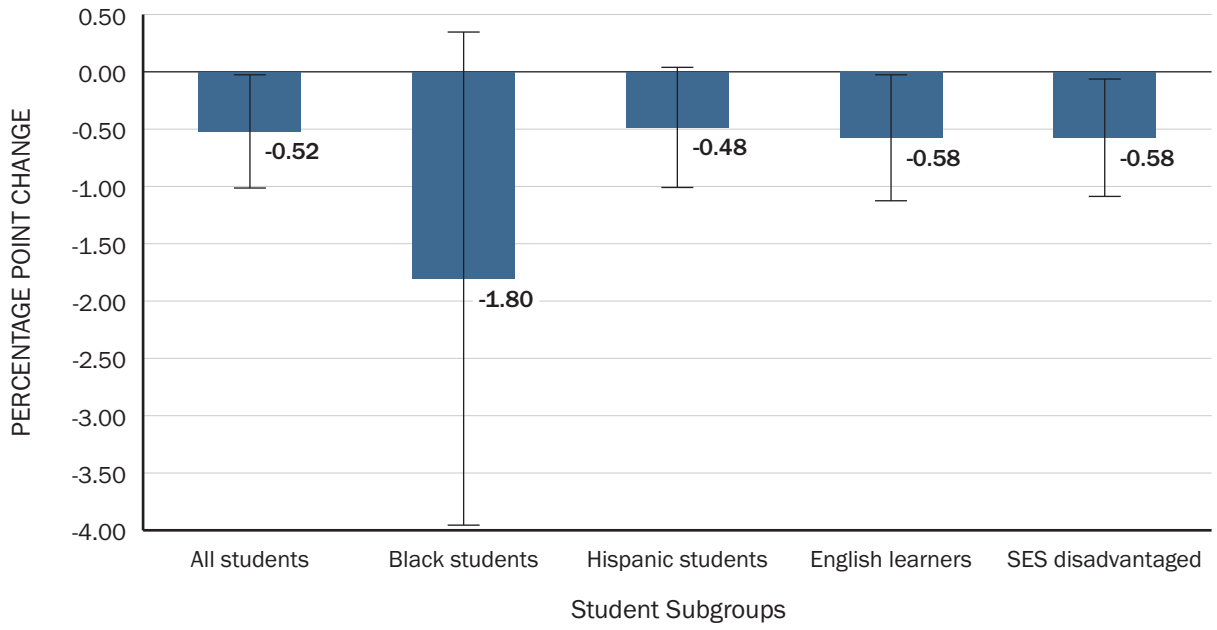


Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Suspension rates by group are modeled controlling for school characteristics (enrollment; percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless students, English learners, and youth in foster care; and racial/ethnic composition) and include school and year fixed effects. Adjusted suspension rates shown in this figure reflect levels relative to 2022–23, the baseline year when most schools were hiring community school coordinators and setting up for full implementation the next year. Due to limited in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2019–20 and 2020–21 data are excluded.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

When we break down impacts by student subgroup (Figure 5) and school type (Figure 6), we find particularly large improvements among Black students, whose suspension rates were reduced by 1.8 percentage points (significant at p <0.10 level) and in secondary (middle/high) schools at roughly 1.3 percentage points (significant at p <0.10 level). Notably, these are the set of students and schools where suspension rates were highest before treatment. The community school approaches implemented by the grants also significantly reduced the suspension rates of English learners and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. Finally, reductions were greater in smaller schools.

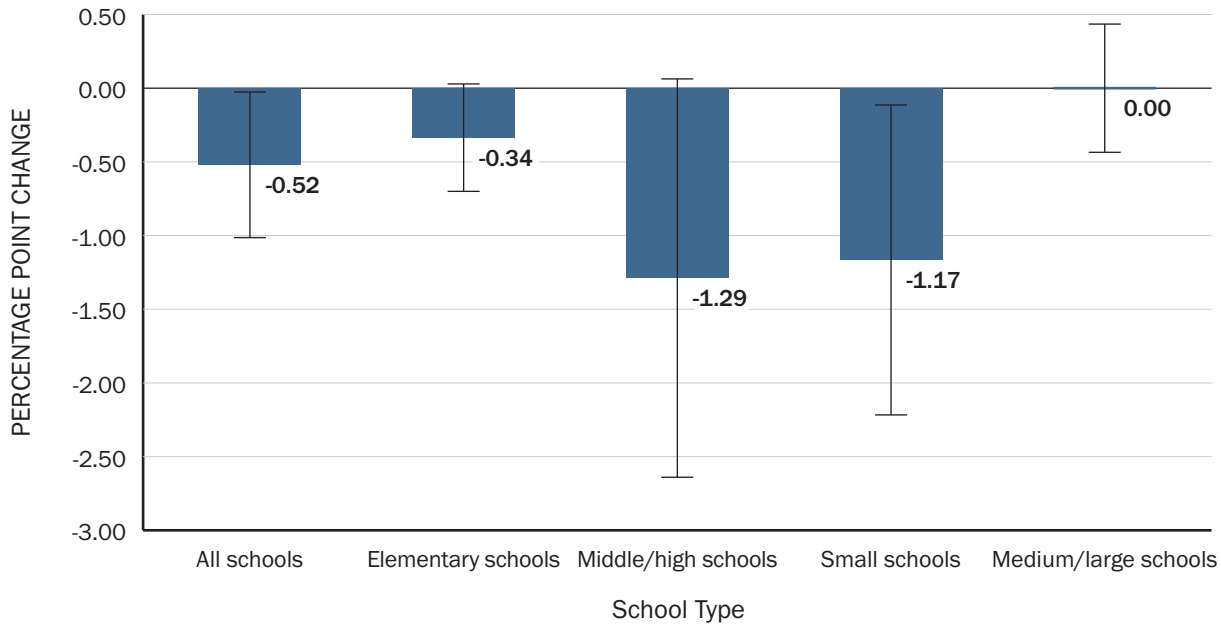
Figure 5. CCSPP Community School Effects on Suspension Rates, by Student Group



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Figure 6. CCSPP Community School Effects on Suspension Rates, by School Type



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

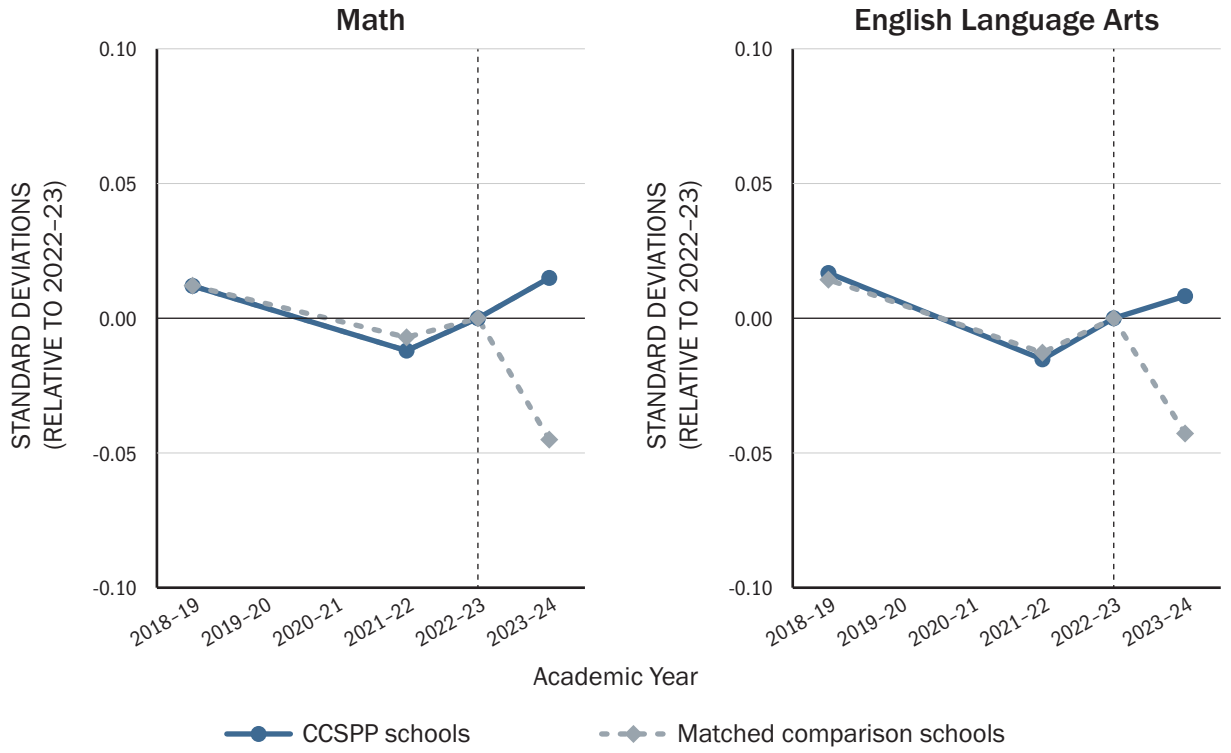
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Math and English Language Arts Achievement Results

While prior research on community school interventions typically finds that test score impacts take longer to emerge, our analyses, which have a larger sample than prior studies, indicates early significant positive effects in the first full year of CCSPP implementation on math scores overall and ELA achievement for several student groups (significant at p <0.10 level).

Figure 7 shows that achievement in both math and ELA tracked closely between CCSPP and comparison schools prior to treatment, but that they diverged post treatment. Since the 2021–22 school year, math and ELA scores in CCSPP schools have steadily increased, while performance in comparison schools declined in 2023–24.

Figure 7. Trends in Predicted Standardized Math and English Language Arts Scores (Indexed to 2022–23 Rates), by Treatment Status



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress (CAASPP) scale scores standardized within the analytic sample are modeled controlling for school characteristics (enrollment; percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless students, English learners, and youth in foster care; and racial/ethnic composition) and include school and year fixed effects. Adjusted standardized test scores shown in this figure reflect levels relative to 2022–23, the baseline year when most schools were hiring community school coordinators and setting up for full implementation the next year. Due to limited in-person instruction during the COVID-19 pandemic, 2019–20 and 2020–21 data are excluded. Districts with Full-Service Community Schools grants are excluded from this analysis because of prior exposure to the community schools approach.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

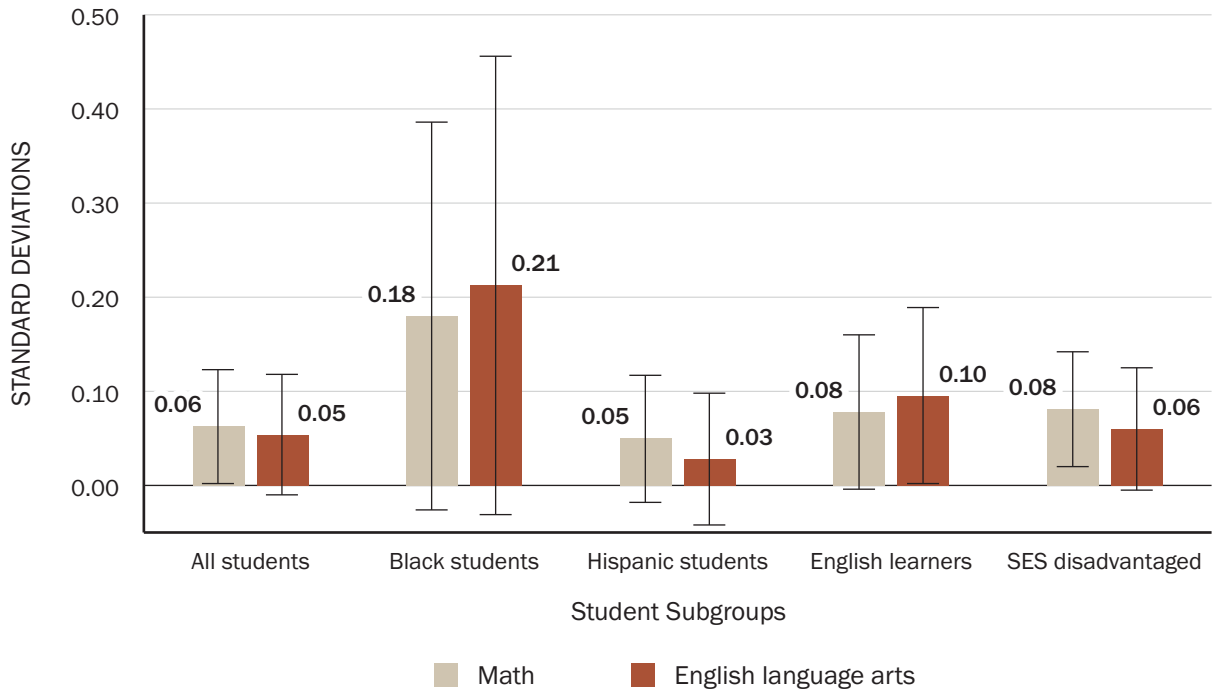
As displayed in Figure 8, the overall effect of receiving a CCSPP grant on math achievement was 0.06 standard deviations (*SD*), while on ELA achievement it was 0.05 *SD*. While modest in magnitude, the overall impacts for math are statistically significant and represent meaningful educational progress when translated into practical terms. Contextualizing these effect sizes within the education literature, interventions producing effects of 0.05–0.10 *SD* are generally considered substantively meaningful, particularly for systemwide initiatives implemented at scale.[21] The measured effects on achievement fall within this range of educationally significant impacts.

Translating these effect sizes into more intuitive metrics, the math achievement gain of 0.06 *SD* corresponds to approximately 43 additional days of learning, while the ELA achievement gain of 0.05 *SD* corresponds to approximately 36 additional days of learning. These overall effects demonstrate that the community schools approach, which emphasizes integrated student supports, family and community

engagement, collaborative leadership and practices, expanded learning time, as well as establishing positive conditions for learning through social and emotional learning, restorative practices, and community-connected learning, can produce measurable gains in core academic outcomes even within the relatively short implementation time frame examined in this study.

When looking at the impact of CCSPP implementation on different subgroups of students and schools, our analyses yielded substantially larger benefits for historically underserved student populations, particularly Black students. As illustrated in Figure 8, estimated effects for Black students were approximately 0.18 *SD* in math and 0.21 *SD* in ELA (significant at $p < 0.10$ level)—more than triple the magnitude of the overall effects. English learners also experienced larger-than-average achievement gains and were the group that made the most significant progress in English language arts. It is worth noting, however, that there was large variance in outcomes for these groups, with some outcomes not statistically significant at conventional levels, indicating that some community schools' implementation served minoritized students particularly well, while others fell short in this initial time frame.

Figure 8. Effects on Student Achievement, by Student Group



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include grade fixed effects, school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Math and English language arts scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.

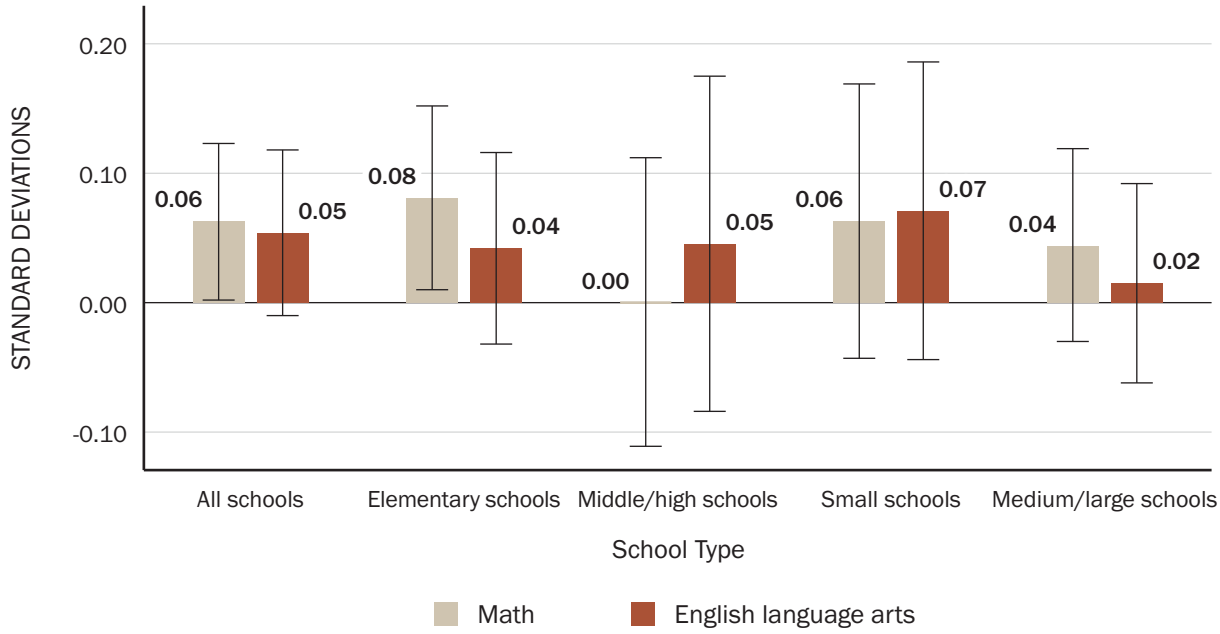
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

The differential impacts for Black students translate to approximately 130 days of additional learning in math and 151 days in ELA, representing substantial acceleration in academic progress, while English learners' benefits equate to 58 and 72 days more of learning in math and ELA, respectively. The larger

effects observed among Black students and English learners suggest that the community schools approach may be particularly effective at addressing long-standing opportunity gaps and barriers to achievement that disproportionately affect these student populations.

Figure 9 shows differences in community school impacts by school type. Gains in math were stronger in elementary schools than middle and high schools and also stronger in small schools compared to medium or large schools, though impacts subset by school size were not statistically significant.

Figure 9. Effects on Student Achievement, by School Type



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include grade fixed effects, school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Math and ELA scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Table 5 shows the grade-level equivalent gains range from 22 to 130 days of additional learning across different student groups and subject areas. These metrics provide a more intuitive understanding of the practical significance of the observed effects. For example, the 130-day equivalent gain in math learning among Black students represents more than two thirds of an academic year of additional progress attributed to CCSPP implementation.

The emergence of these positive academic effects in the early stages of implementation—contrary to patterns observed in some previous community schools initiatives where academic impacts took longer to materialize—highlights the potential of California's robust implementation model for new community schools. Continued monitoring of these outcomes will be essential to determine whether the promising early impacts observed here continue to grow as the initiative matures.

Table 5. Grade-Level Equivalent Gains Associated With CCSPP Community Schools

Student group	Math		English language arts	
	Effect size (*SD*)	Grade-level equivalent (days of learning)	Effect size (*SD*)	Grade-level equivalent (days of learning)
All students	0.06*	43	0.05	36
Black students	0.18+	130	0.21+	151
Hispanic/Latino students	0.05	36	0.03	22
English learners	0.08+	58	0.10*	72
SES disadvantaged	0.08**	58	0.06+	43

Notes: ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. CCSPP = California Community School Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Grade-level equivalence in days of learning here is calculated for ease of interpretation using a simplified pooled measure of average learning gains across grades (0.25 *SD* for a 180-day school year). Noting that standardized learning gains vary by grade, subject, and student subgroup, this metric gives a rough estimate of the meaning of effect sizes that reflect shifts in percentile ranks of schools and subgroups.

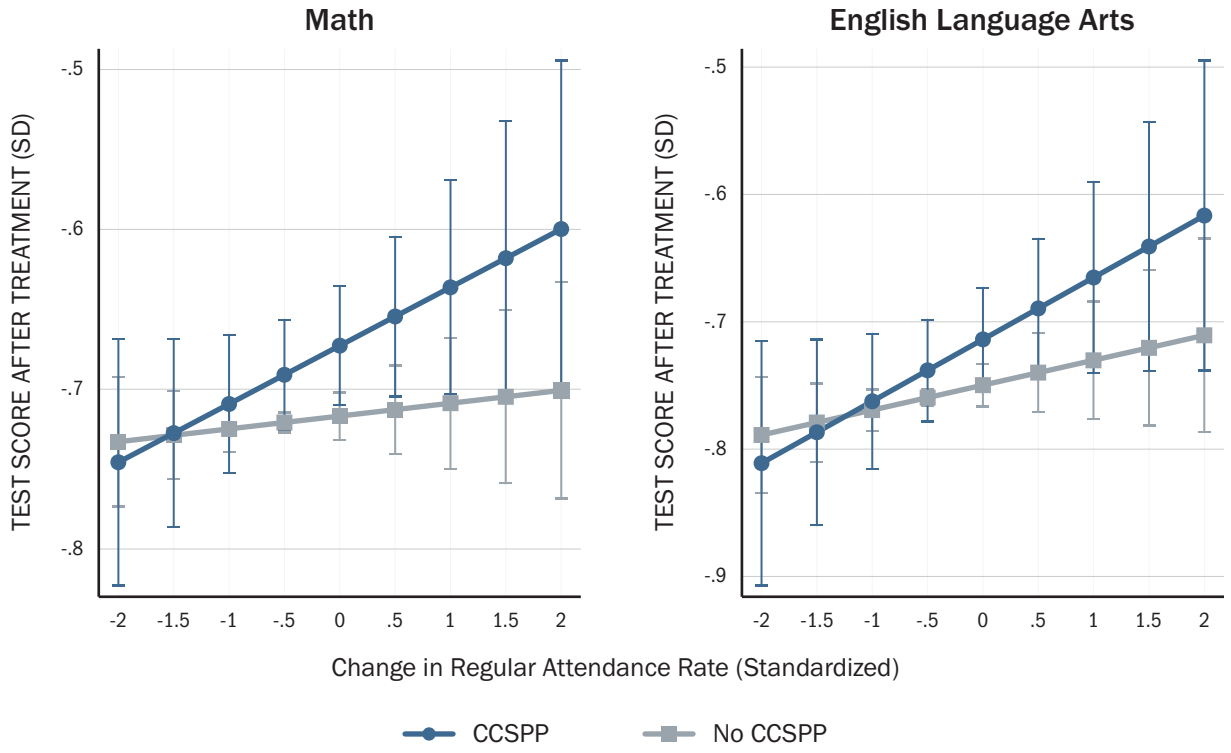
Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Relationships Between Reduced Chronic Absence and Achievement

Our analyses reveal not only that CCSPP-supported community schools have on average reduced chronic absence and improved student achievement but also that the relationship between community school implementation and achievement outcomes is related to changes in attendance patterns. This interaction effect suggests that the effectiveness of community schools on academic outcomes varies depending on the degree to which they successfully address attendance challenges.

Aligned with our primary analysis of achievement impacts, our interaction models show that community schools making average improvements in reducing chronic absence rates (compared to non-CCSPP schools) improved math achievement by approximately 0.05 standard deviations. Beyond this baseline effect, each additional standard deviation of improvement in regular attendance was associated with 0.05 *SD* of additional improvement in math learning (see Figure 10). This cumulative pattern meant that community schools that were particularly successful in addressing attendance (improving by 2 *SD*s more than the average) showed math performance gains of nearly 0.15 *SD* more than matched non-community schools. Though smaller in magnitude and marginally significant, parallel patterns emerged for English language arts achievement.

Figure 10. Relationship Between Improved Regular Attendance and Test Scores, by CCSPP Status



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Regular attendance rate is calculated as the percentage of students who attended school at least 90% of the time. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Values are modeled controlling for school characteristics (enrollment; percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless students, English learners, and youth in foster care; and racial/ethnic composition) and include school and year fixed effects. Models for student achievement also include grade fixed effects.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Several plausible explanations may account for this relationship. First, improved attendance directly increases instructional time, providing students with more opportunities to engage with academic content and receive teacher support. The compounding effects of consistent attendance may be particularly important in math, where content tends to build sequentially and missed instruction can create significant learning gaps. Second, the specific integrated supports implemented through the community schools approach likely address underlying barriers that simultaneously affect both attendance and learning capacity. For example, improved access to health services may reduce illness-related absences while also enhancing students' physical readiness to learn. Similarly, mental health supports may reduce stress-related chronic absence while improving cognitive functioning and focus during instructional time. Third, improved family engagement—a core pillar of the community schools approach—may simultaneously strengthen parents' commitment to regular school attendance and their capacity to support learning at home. This dual impact could help explain why attendance improvements translate into achievement gains. Fourth, teachers may increase focus on instruction given the additional staff and resources to address students' basic needs.[22] Finally, the cultural shift toward greater belonging and engagement

fostered by the community schools approach may motivate students not only to attend school more regularly but also to participate more actively when present. This increased engagement likely enhances the quality of students' learning experiences, not just the quantity of instructional time received.

These findings highlight the importance of addressing chronic absence not merely as a compliance issue but as a fundamental educational equity strategy with direct implications for academic outcomes. They also suggest that the most successful community schools are those that effectively integrate attendance interventions with broader strategies to enhance student engagement, well-being, and learning supports.

Contextualizing Impacts on Student Outcomes

Positive impacts across multiple outcomes emerged during the first full year of CCSPP implementation, with effect magnitudes that were largest among historically underserved student groups. The pattern and timing of effects provide important insights into how the community schools approach influences different domains of student success. Our findings largely align with patterns observed in previous smaller-scale evaluations of community schools initiatives across the country. The substantial early impacts on attendance align with prior research, which has consistently found that community schools effectively address barriers to regular school attendance.[23] The Community Schools Initiative in New York City, for example, demonstrated similar reductions in chronic absence within the first 2 years of implementation.[24]

The significant attendance improvements take on particular significance in the context of California's postpandemic recovery efforts. Following the COVID-19 pandemic, California schools experienced unprecedented levels of chronic absence, with statewide rates more than doubling from prepandemic levels. This dramatic increase in chronic absence coincided with rising poverty rates and deteriorating indicators of student well-being across multiple domains. Data from the California Health Interview Survey reveal that between 2019 and 2022, the percentage of California students experiencing food insecurity and persistent feelings of sadness or hopelessness rose substantially among adolescents during this period.[25] Against this challenging backdrop, the community schools approach appears to offer a particularly relevant framework for reengaging students and addressing the complex barriers to attendance that intensified during and after the pandemic.

Prior research has shown varied effects on suspension rates and other disciplinary outcomes, with some initiatives demonstrating modest improvements and others showing no significant change. While CCSPP implementation appears to have generated positive impacts overall in reducing suspensions, we also find large variance in discipline patterns, overall and by subgroups.

The emergence of positive achievement effects in the early stages of implementation is notable, given that previous community schools research has generally found that significant impacts on standardized test scores take longer to materialize, often appearing only after 3–5 years of implementation.[26] In contrast, CCSPP schools show modest but statistically significant academic improvements within the first full year of implementation. This deviation from established patterns suggests that California's implementation model, with its robust funding structure and comprehensive technical assistance, may accelerate the academic impact of the community schools approach, at least among schools with limited prior exposure to community school approaches. Similar to disciplinary outcomes, the early gains

in achievement were more varied by subgroup and sensitive to analytic strategy. However, the early academic effects are particularly meaningful given the substantial learning disruptions experienced during the pandemic and the widening of preexisting achievement gaps documented across California districts.

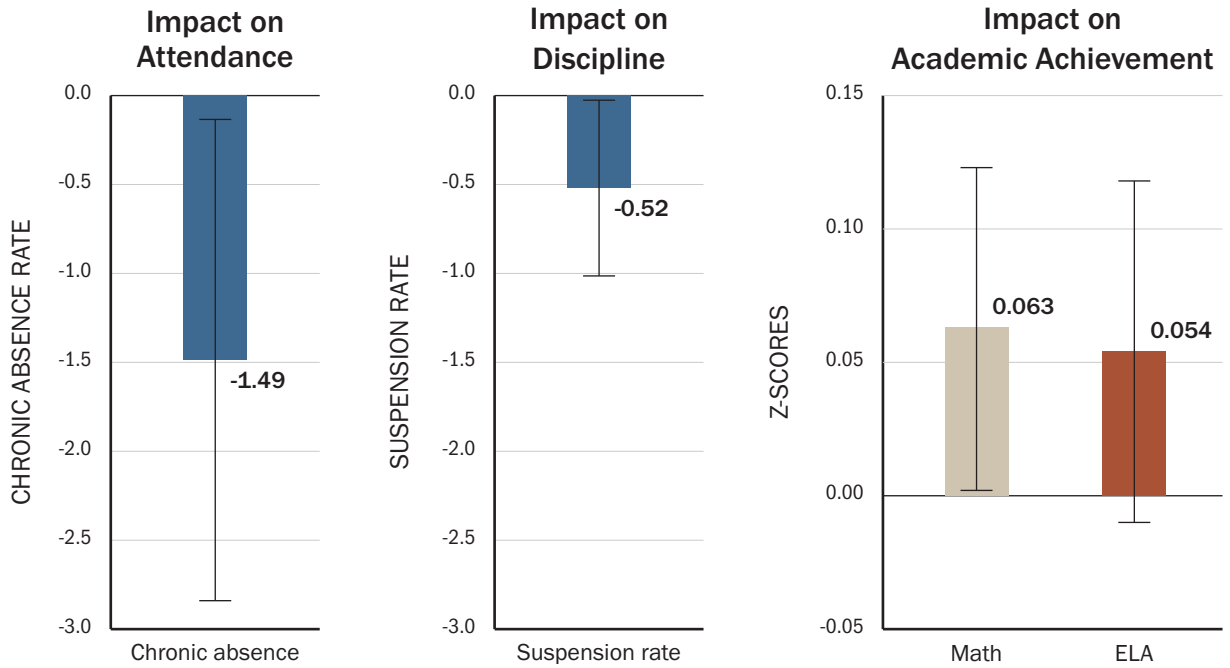
Community schools represent a particularly promising approach for advancing educational equity.

We find substantially larger benefits among Black students across outcome domains. These differential impacts have substantial implications for the community schools approach as a potential tool for narrowing persistent opportunity and outcome gaps in California's educational system. By centering family assets in engagement work and more effectively addressing the structural barriers and resource inequities that disproportionately affect Black students and other marginalized populations, community schools represent a particularly promising approach for advancing educational equity. The comprehensive nature of the community schools strategy appears especially well suited to addressing the compounding effects of poverty, systemic racism, and resource inequities that were further exacerbated during the pandemic recovery period.[27] For Black students, who have historically faced the compounded challenges of high rates of poverty, chronically underresourced schooling, and disproportionate exclusionary discipline practices, the CCSPP intervention appears to be a powerful lever for change.

English learners have long encountered distinct obstacles, including limited access to tailored language instruction, cultural disconnects within schools, and a lack of comprehensive support services. The CCSPP initiative shows strong potential to address these challenges and foster meaningful improvements in their educational experiences and outcomes by integrating language development and rigorous academic instruction, while honoring students' cultural assets and home languages as foundations for learning rather than deficits to overcome. Studies indicate that when schools implement integrated family engagement strategies and extended learning opportunities specifically designed for multilingual learners, students demonstrate accelerated English language development alongside improved academic outcomes.[28] Furthermore, community schools that deliver wraparound services while fostering inclusive school climates have proved particularly effective in supporting English learners' holistic development, addressing the intersection of linguistic, academic, and social-emotional needs that influence their educational trajectory.[29]

While this study examines several critical student outcomes with promising results across the available measures (see Figure 11), we acknowledge that many important domains of impact remain unmeasured in our analyses, especially at this stage. Community schools aim to influence a wide range of outcomes valued by families and communities, including student physical and mental health; family economic stability and well-being; student social-emotional development and sense of belonging; community cohesion and social capital; and student civic engagement and agency.

Figure 11. Summary of Main Effect Findings Across Outcomes



Notes: CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. ELA = English language arts. Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Math and English language arts scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

These unmeasured outcomes may be of equal or greater importance to communities and families than the standardized metrics included in our analyses. We recognize this limitation while also maintaining that the outcomes we do measure—attendance, disciplinary incidents, and academic achievement—are essential indicators of educational opportunity and success that have been understudied as community school outcomes at this scale of intervention.

Furthermore, the full impact of community schools may only emerge over a longer period of time than what is captured in this early-stage evaluation. As implementation deepens and services become more comprehensive and integrated, additional benefits may materialize across both measured and unmeasured domains.[30] This temporal dimension is particularly important given the extraordinary challenges of the postpandemic context, where recovery efforts are occurring simultaneously with the development of community school structures and processes. While substantial expansions of the program through three cohorts are now underway, the emergent positive findings here point to the potential value of more work toward sustainability and scaling moving forward.

Key Findings

Our analyses of the data in this study result in the following key findings:

- **CCSPP implementation grants reached a diverse set of high-need schools across the state.** The program successfully distributed resources across varied school levels, geographic regions, and settings with differing levels of prior exposure to community school approaches, ensuring broad representation in the initial implementation cohort. The average school served in the first cohort had roughly 90% of students who were from low-income households, English learners, or foster youth. These students are identified as part of the unduplicated pupil count (UPC), a measure used in California to capture a school's concentration of historically underserved students.
- **Community school approaches significantly reduced chronic absence in the first year of implementation.** CCSPP schools demonstrated a meaningful reduction in chronic absence; this reduction was, on average, 30% greater than that experienced by similar matched comparison schools. Improvements in regular attendance were most pronounced in elementary schools, suggesting particularly strong early implementation of attendance-focused strategies at this level. Because of the scale of the grant program, the average reduction in absence rates equates to more than 5,000 additional students attending school regularly in the first year.
- **CCSPP community schools achieved a notable reduction in suspension rates.** Implementation of community school approaches corresponded with a 15% reduction in average suspension rates. Reduced suspension rates were largest in secondary schools, where baseline suspension rates were higher and where restorative practices and improved school climate may have had the greatest impact on disciplinary outcomes.
- **CCSPP community schools improved student test scores.** Schools implementing community school approaches showed overall gains of 0.06 standard deviations in math compared to matched schools—roughly the equivalent of 43 additional days of learning. CCSPP community schools also showed larger-than-expected gains in ELA scores (0.05 standard deviations overall), equivalent to approximately 36 additional days of learning, though ELA effects were only statistically significant for some student subgroups. During this same time period, comparison schools showed declines in achievement in both subjects.
- **Gains were largest for historically underserved students.** While students from all backgrounds benefited from the community school investments, there were larger-than-average effects for Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students. The differential impacts for Black students translate to approximately 130 days of additional learning in math and 151 days in ELA, representing substantial acceleration in academic progress. Benefits for English learners equate to 58 and 72 days more of learning in math and ELA, respectively. For socioeconomically disadvantaged students, these impacts are roughly equivalent to 58 additional days of learning in math and 43 days of learning in ELA. The larger effects observed among Black students and English learners suggest that the community schools approach may be particularly effective at addressing long-standing opportunity gaps and barriers to achievement that disproportionately affect these student populations. Black students in CCSPP community schools also experienced a reduction in chronic absence and suspensions at more than double the overall rates.

- **CCSPP community schools' test score improvements were most substantial in schools that made the greatest progress in reducing chronic absence.** Each standard deviation improvement in CCSPP school attendance was associated with a near doubling of the main effect on achievement. The significant interaction between regular attendance gains among grantees in predicting increased learning suggests the interconnected nature of attendance and academic performance, reflecting the holistic impacts of community school engagement strategies.

Discussion and Conclusion

One of the strong values of community schools is building a sense of responsive community, which is particularly important for families and children who have had negative experiences with public institutions. When families do not view their public schools as caring about the challenges they face and valuing the assets they may bring to the table, it is difficult to build trust. True student and family engagement requires a sense that the school views them as whole people, connecting high expectations and rigorous instruction with supportive services that address their needs and inspire their hard work toward their aspirations.

The California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) offers a test of whether state investment and support can help (further) develop these principles in schools across the state as they emerge from a devastatingly disruptive pandemic. Case studies and rigorous analyses of annual progress reports have indicated that many schools are indeed embracing and expanding community school practices. This report provides early evidence that the new resources and approaches are getting children back to school, lessening the need for exclusionary discipline, and increasing the rate of learning, especially among students who have been historically underserved.

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The first cohort of CCSPP recipients has now reached a stage where we can begin to observe impacts on an important, but limited, set of student outcomes at scale. However, it will take longer to more fully understand how schools' embrace of community school approaches and additional resources shape student outcomes over time. In prior evaluations of community schools, impacts have gradually expanded over time, with attendance effects showing early and others emerging as partnerships, pedagogical practices, and community connections settle in.

The staggered implementation of CCSPP in California allows for a rich exploration of effects across a diversity of contexts as later cohorts shift into the category of treated and increase the sample of subgroups for more cross-cutting analysis. We also look forward to examining differences in apparent effectiveness by community school practices as reported in their annual progress reports, as well as impacts on teacher retention and longer-term student outcomes as they become available. However, the initial positive findings presented here suggest a promising return on this historic investment.

The substantial reductions in chronic absence observed among CCSPP implementation grantees are both statistically significant and practically meaningful, aligning with prior community school findings from longitudinal studies of New York City's community schools initiative and recent evaluations of Maryland's community schools grants. Emergent findings of reduced suspensions and improved test scores are also promising, as these took time to become statistically significant in New York City, where the sample of treated schools was smaller. Given this consistent pattern across multiple research contexts, we might reasonably expect additional positive impacts of the CCSPP grants to emerge over a

longer implementation time frame as schools more fully integrate community schools strategies. When considering the relatively modest per-pupil cost of the grant program—ranging from under $240 per student in large schools to $500–$1,500 in smaller settings—the CCSPP appears to represent an efficient public investment for addressing persistent educational inequities in California's highest-need schools, with particularly notable benefits accruing to Black students, English learners, and socioeconomically disadvantaged students.

Although the aggregate findings present promising evidence of impact, it is crucial to emphasize that this report represents average outcomes across a highly diverse array of schools and districts. In practice, even with appropriate guidance and support, CCSPP schools and districts vary significantly in their capacity, commitment, and contexts, leading to important variations in implementation. For instance, an analysis of grant reports indicated that CCSPP sites self-reported differing levels of experience in implementing key aspects of the community schools strategy (e.g., integrated student supports and services, collaborative leadership and practices), as well as diverse local priorities (e.g., a positive and restorative school climate, community-based curriculum and instruction).

Compelling case study research on robust recovery trajectories provides valuable insights into the mechanisms and implementation approaches within community school districts and sites that are fully implementing the strategy. For example, the West Kern Consortium for Full-Service Community Schools (West Kern) has demonstrated how utilizing strategic partnerships, shared funding models, and cross-district coordination can enhance collective capacity and accelerate positive change in rural or underresourced regions.[31] West Kern's coordinated investments in mental health staffing, cross-district summer learning, and family partnerships appear to contribute not only to improved attendance but also to the academic growth of students. West Kern has dedicated shared investments in math coaching and peer feedback through teacher cross-site observations. The Consortium has also established a Children's Cabinet, bringing together local education agencies, county agencies, parents, and community partners to collaboratively address issues such as chronic absence and access to mental health care. These multifaceted strategies appear to be contributing not only to improved attendance but also to greater academic growth, highlighting how comprehensive implementation can drive recovery and transformation.

Our analyses reveal that impacts were consistently strongest at the elementary level across all outcome domains studied. Although high schools and middle schools made big gains in reducing suspension rates, the inconsistent impacts on attendance and achievement at the secondary level suggest a need for targeted supports to enhance community school implementation in secondary settings, where scale and traditional structures often present barriers to core community school practices such as deep family engagement and student leadership development. In this regard, implementing a community schools strategy may present an opportunity to fundamentally redesign traditional high school environments based on research that illustrates features grounded in the science of learning and development that are associated with greater student and school success.[32]

Further research is needed to more comprehensively understand the impacts of California's historic investment in community schools. This includes examining a broader range of outcomes for Cohort 1 implementation grantees, such as school climate measures, dropout/graduation rates, and teacher retention rates, while also tracking these schools' progress over additional implementation years. A particularly compelling area for further investigation is the dynamic interplay between chronic absence,

school discipline, and academic achievement, wherein improvements in one domain are accompanied by advancements in the others. Furthermore, it is essential to identify which implementation characteristics are most strongly associated with robust and sustained outcomes. Such insights will be crucial in identifying specific practices and local conditions that facilitate progress across multiple domains and may have cascading effects.

As cohorts 2–4 advance in their implementation journeys, incorporating their experiences and outcomes into the analyses will provide a more complete picture of the initiative's effectiveness across diverse contexts. Importantly, the CCSPP presents a valuable opportunity not only to document what outcomes are achieved for students and schools but also to investigate how these outcomes emerge through specific practices and implementation approaches. This latter dimension can be most effectively captured through qualitative research methods as part of a mixed-methods evaluative approach that illuminates both the results and mechanisms of California's community schools transformation.

Appendix A: Methods and Data

Data Sources

This study primarily utilizes publicly available data published by the California Department of Education.[33] We focus our main analyses on data from 2021–22 to 2023–24 but also analyzed data from 2018–19 onward to understand trends in various student outcomes prior to treatment. We drew from the CALPADS Unduplicated Pupil Count Source File, the Public Schools and Districts File, Cumulative Enrollment Data File, Chronic Absenteeism and Absenteeism by Reason Data Files, Suspension Data, and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files for Smarter Balanced Assessments. All data are at the school level, with disaggregation by state-defined student subgroup. Additionally, we obtained the list of California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) grantees from the May 2022, May 2023, and May 2024 State Board of Education meeting agendas. We obtained information on the implementation status of Cohort 1 grantees through direct correspondence with the California Department of Education. For information on school urbanicity, we utilized the EDGE School Geocode Data provided by the U.S. Department of Education.[34] We also obtained a list of California districts that received prior federal community schools funding from the Full-Service Community Schools website.[35]

Matching Strategy

As the program intended, the CCSPP grantees were among the highest-need schools in the state (roughly 90% unduplicated pupil count [UPC] on average) with absence rates 10 percentage points higher than the state average in the first cohort. To account for this large difference between the grantees and typical California public schools, we constructed a matched comparison group that mirrored the CCSPP grantee schools in prior outcome patterns and demographic composition.

We utilized propensity score matching to identify a control group for our difference-in-differences analysis on the impact of CCSPP. We tested various matching approaches to identify the one that best balanced the sample while yielding precise estimates in our analyses. Upon assessing post-matching covariate balance and parallel pre-trends, we selected 1:1 nearest neighbor matching with replacement as our primary approach, as this offered adequate precision and ease of interpretation in our main results. Table A1 shows the descriptive statistics comparing California schools, CCSPP Cohort 1 schools, and matched comparison schools based on 2022–23 data. As reflected in the table, Cohort 1 schools and matched comparison schools are much more similar on average compared to schools in California overall.

Table A1. Descriptive Statistics Comparing California Schools, CCSPP Cohort 1 Schools, and Matched Comparison Schools (2022–23)

Characteristic	California	CCSPP Cohort 1	Matched comparison schools
N	10,714	443	396
Student characteristics			
Average enrollment	633 (590.079)	608 (453.622)	589 (422.677)
Percentage of unduplicated pupil count students	66.7% (26.357)	90.1% (7.152)	89.7% (7.941)
Percentage of socioeconomically disadvantaged students	60.9% (30.041)	87.7% (8.017)	86.7% (9.270)
Percentage of English learners	20.8% (16.896)	36.2% (18.991)	33.9% (17.836)
Percentage of White students	19.8% (21.672)	8.3% (14.958)	8.9% (14.047)
Percentage of Black students	4.6% (8.697)	8.2% (12.145)	8.8% (13.192)
Percentage of Asian students	7.0% (13.542)	4.2% (9.766)	6.2% (13.470)
Percentage of Hispanic/Latino students	51.7% (30.774)	71.0% (24.390)	69.1% (24.118)
School characteristics			
Charter	12.7%	8.8%	12.9%
School level			
• Elementary	59.7%	63.2%	65.4%
• Middle	13.6%	14.7%	12.4%
• High	21%	18.5%	19.9%
• Elementary-High combination	5.6%	3.6%	2.3%
School size			
• Very small (Fewer than 150 students)	14.7%	7.7%	10.4%
• Small (150–400 students)	25.6%	33.6%	32.6%
• Medium (401–1,000 students)	48.5%	49.2%	50.5%
• Medium/Large (1,001–2,000 students)	7.8%	8.1%	4.8%
• Large (Over 2,000 students)	3.4%	1.4%	1.8%
Locale			
• City	40.9%	52.7%	46.2%
• Suburban	39.5%	26%	36.8%
• Town	7.1%	6.1%	7.1%
• Rural	12.5%	15.2%	9.9%

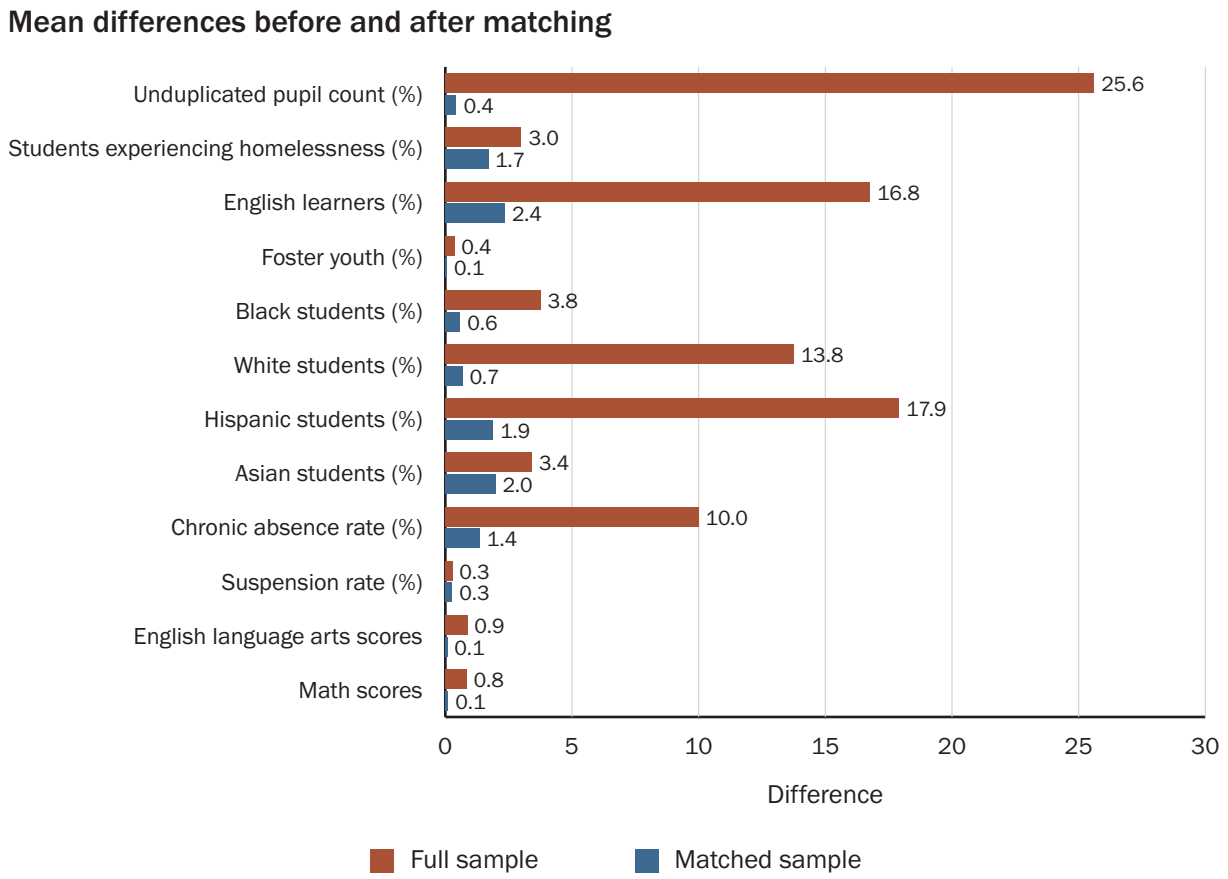
Characteristic	California	CCSPP Cohort 1	Matched comparison schools
Student outcomes			
Chronic absence rate	29.4% (18.062)	38.6% (18.678)	37.2% (16.994)
Suspension rate	3.4% (5.961)	3.8% (4.818)	3.6% (4.841)
Standardized math score	0.006 (0.983)	-0.760 (0.635)	-0.679 (0.625)
Standardized English language arts score	-0.004 (0.979)	-0.798 (0.706)	-0.719 (0.668)

Notes: The number of treated schools in the matched sample reduced from 458 schools that received CCSPP Cohort 1 funding to 443 schools because 15 schools had missing student and school characteristics data that were needed for the matching. Standard deviations are included in parentheses. Student characteristics, school characteristics, and student outcomes data are based on 2021–22 school year.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Figure A1 shows the extent to which the matching strategy reduced differences between the CCSPP grantees and comparison schools. The first set of bars shows differences between CCSPP grantees and all other California schools on a set of baseline characteristics, whereas the second set of bars shows the differences between CCSPP schools and the matched comparison sample at baseline. The characteristics shown in the figure include pre-treatment chronic absence rates, suspension rates, math and ELA scores, as well as the percentage of students experiencing homelessness, racial and ethnic composition, low socioeconomic status students, and percent UPC. With the matched comparison group, the differences in pre-treatment means between CCSPP recipients and comparison schools were greatly reduced, meaning the matching process served to greatly reduce the impact that selection bias may have had in our estimates.

Figure A1. Treatment and Control Baseline Differences Before and After Creating a Matched Sample



Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Difference-in-Differences

The primary analytic strategy can be understood as a matched sample difference-in-differences (DiD) or comparative interrupted time series (CITS) design. Our models include school and year fixed effects, which allow us to adjust for all characteristics (observed and unobserved) of the schools that are consistent over time and all characteristics of a given year that are consistent across schools. This can reduce bias in our estimates caused by selection into treatment and trends in the state over time in the outcome.

In the case of Cohort 1, which is the cohort we focus our analyses on, we had available 1 year of completely post-treatment outcomes (2023–24) and at least 2 years of pre-treatment data after the return to school postpandemic (2021–22 and 2022–23). For our primary results, we employed a school-level ordinary least squares (OLS) model with school and year fixed effects and time-variant school-level controls. The main predictor of interest is an indicator for whether the school was awarded a CCSPP grant beginning in 2022–23, and our outcomes of interest were school-level chronic absence rates, suspension rates, and standardized test scores.

The basic OLS model with school and year fixed effects and time-variant school-level controls can be understood as follows:

$$y_{st} = \beta_0 + \beta_1 CCSPP_{st} + \alpha_s + Z_{st}\beta_2 + \beta_3 Year_t + \epsilon_{it}$$

Where y_{st} represents the set of outcomes of interest including chronic absence, suspension rates, and standardized test scores for school s in year t. The $CCSPP_{st}$ is an indicator for whether a school s received a community school implementation grant prior to year t (2023–24 for Cohort 1) and the parameter of interest β_1 captures the differential outcomes in the post-grant period for CCSPP grantees relative to comparison non-grantees. The α_s represents a school fixed effect, which accounts for all characteristics of a school that are constant over time, and the Z_{st} is a vector of time-variant school characteristics (e.g., % UPC, % Hispanic, % White, % Black, % Asian, % English learner, % homeless, total enrollment, and charter school status). The $Year_t$ represents a year fixed effect that accounts for any statewide trends each year, and the ϵ_{it} represents the heteroskedasticity-robust error term clustered at the school level. While our primary analytic sample excludes schools with prior exposure to the community schools model through Full-Service Community Schools grants, we conduct additional analyses that seek to descriptively understand the recovery patterns in these large districts' schools, and how they differed from schools that do not have the additional funding and support provided by CCSPP.

The causal interpretation of our difference-in-differences approach rests on several critical assumptions. Most importantly, we assume parallel trends—that treatment and comparison schools would have followed similar trajectories in the absence of the intervention. We validate this assumption by examining pre-treatment trends and conducting event study analyses that test for anticipatory effects or preexisting differences in outcome trajectories. Additionally, we assess potential threats from student sorting or compositional changes around treatment implementation by analyzing student mobility patterns and demographic shifts. To strengthen credibility further, we conduct robustness checks using alternative comparison groups, different model specifications, and placebo tests with outcomes that should be unaffected by the intervention. (See Appendix B.) Throughout these checks, we remain attentive to the potential for heterogeneous treatment effects across different school contexts and student populations, acknowledging that community school approaches may impact schools differently depending on their baseline resources and needs.

Appendix B: Robustness Checks, Considerations, and Limitations

Two key threats to interpreting the findings as community schools causally improving student outcomes that emerge when using a difference-in-differences design like the one we employ here are (1) the potential for student sorting associated with the treatment, such that grantee schools post-treatment are serving a different set of students than they were before receiving the grants, and (2) prior trends demonstrating divergence across the treated schools from the comparison schools, such that they might have been expected to improve more even without the intervention. Both are estimated using the same matched comparison sample reported in the findings section.

We find little evidence of differential student sorting between the California Community School Partnership Program (CCSPP) grantees and their matched comparison schools. Using the same model that shows significant divergence in all three student outcomes, but using total enrollment, unduplicated pupil count percentage, and shares of students by race ethnicity and socioeconomic status, we find no substantive changes in student populations associated with the treatment year indicator. Table B1 shows the coefficients and standard errors from separate regressions estimating impacts of CCSPP grants on student sorting for each specified subgroup. The two demographics where sorting was statistically significant were Asian students and homeless students. For Asian students, the magnitude of the change is less than one third of a percentage point, and for homeless students the magnitude is less than two thirds of a percentage point.

Table B1. Robustness Checks for Student Sorting Associated With Treatment

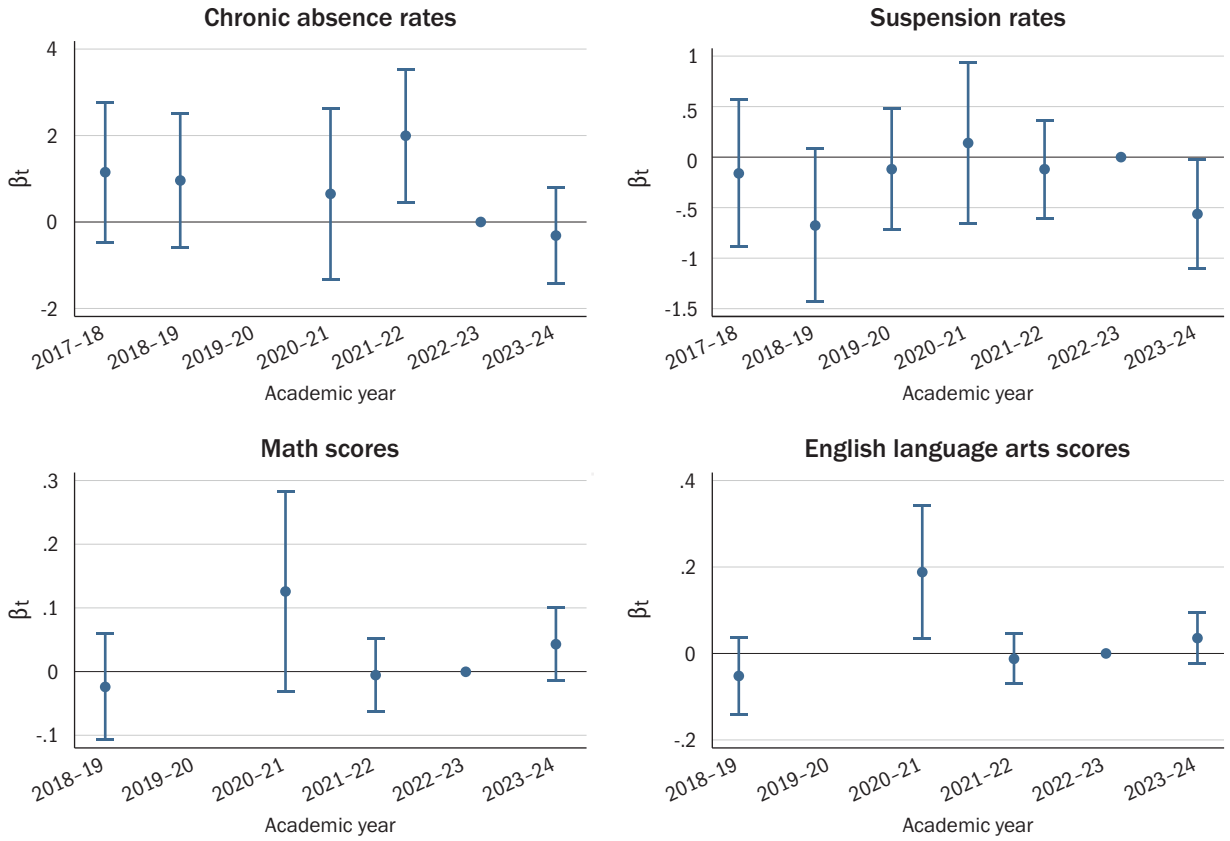
Covariate	CCSPP	Std. Error	R-squared
Total enrollment	0.56	(5.05)	0.01
Percentage of UPC students	-0.22	(0.31)	0.06
Percentage of homeless students	-0.60+	(0.32)	0.03
Percentage of English learners	-0.01	(0.33)	0.06
Percentage of foster students	0.03	(0.10)	0
Percentage of Black students	0.07	(0.15)	0.02
Percentage of White students	0.04	(0.20)	0.02
Percentage of Hispanic/Latino students	0.41	(0.26)	0.06
Percentage of Asian students	-0.27*	(0.11)	0.01
Charter	-0.01	(0.00)	0

Notes: UPC = unduplicated pupil count. ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. Each covariate was regressed with the treatment indicator as the dependent variable, with school and year fixed effects. Analysis excludes schools with prior exposure to community school approaches (schools that received the federal Full-Service Community Schools grant).

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Figure B1 shows event study plots depicting the difference between CCSPP and comparison schools in each year before and after treatment separately across the four outcomes. In checks for prior trends, on all outcomes, we find relatively consistent patterns before treatment. To the extent that there is any prior trend, the 2022–23 divergence could plausibly be attributable to early implementation in some schools. However, we did note a divergence for trends in English language arts scores between treated and comparison schools in 2020–21, which was notably a year with considerable disruption.

Figure B1. Event Study Plots of Student Outcomes, Prior to and Post Treatment



Notes: Error bars represent 95% confidence intervals. Some years of data are missing due to limited data collection and testing during the COVID-19 pandemic. Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level. Analysis excludes schools with prior exposure to community school approaches (schools that received the federal Full-Service Community Schools grant). Math and ELA scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Several important methodological considerations warrant attention when interpreting the findings of this study. First, the relatively short panel of data available for analysis was substantially disrupted by the COVID-19 pandemic, creating challenges in establishing clear pre-intervention trends and limiting our ability to fully discern baseline patterns. While the available prepandemic data suggest reasonable comparability between treatment and comparison schools, the unprecedented disruption to educational systems may have influenced outcome trajectories in ways that complicate causal attribution. We

conducted sensitivity analyses using alternative specifications for our analyses. Second, in conducting sensitivity analyses using alternative specifications that do not exclude schools in districts with prior community school funding (see Table B2), as well as using comparison schools identified through a 5:1 matching approach rather than a 1:1 approach, results for achievement and discipline showed some variability in statistical significance, though the directionality of effects largely remained consistently positive. This pattern aligns with previous community schools research suggesting that academic and behavioral improvements often require longer implementation periods to reach statistical significance and stabilize.

Table B2. Main Effects of CCSPP, Alternative Approaches to Sampling, and Identification of Comparison Schools

Statistic	1:1 matching, excluding schools with prior funding (used in main analyses)	1:1 matching, no schools excluded	5:1 matching, excluding schools with prior funding	All California schools, excluding schools with prior funding
Chronic absence rates				
CCSPP	-1.487*	-2.613**	-1.045+	-2.357**
Standard error	(0.689)	(0.589)	(0.548)	(0.485)
N	1,704	2,511	4,364	25,470
R-squared	0.43	0.43	0.41	0.32
Suspension rates				
CCSPP	-0.520*	-0.315	-0.214	0.129
Standard error	(0.252)	(0.194)	(0.178)	(0.179)
N	1,704	2,511	4,364	25,915
R-squared	0.07	0.05	0.04	0.01
Math achievement				
CCSPP	0.056*	0.012	0.042+	0.033*
Standard error	(0.028)	(0.025)	(0.024)	(0.015)
N	5,251	7,671	13,716	75,531
R-squared	0.07	0.07	0.04	0.07
English language arts achievement				
CCSPP	0.046	0.003	0.032	0.021
Standard error	(0.031)	(0.026)	(0.027)	(0.018)
N	5,243	7,660	13,711	75,539
R-squared	0.07	0.07	0.05	0.06

Notes: ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. In models with school exclusions, schools in districts that received the federal Full-Service Community Schools funding were excluded. For test scores, grade fixed effects are also included, and observations represent grade cohorts within years. Math and ELA scores are standardized within subject, grade, and year.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Third, the non-normal distribution of school-level discipline data—characterized by a large number of zero values, particularly in elementary settings, and heteroskedasticity—creates analytical challenges that render discipline-related estimates sensitive to modeling strategy. In the next two sections, we present results from alternative approaches to modeling changes in suspension rates.

Robustness of Suspension Results to Weighted Regressions

In the main model, we conducted difference-in-differences analyses using linear regression and clustering standard errors by school. In analyses where the dependent variable is a rare occurrence, as in suspension rates (in 2023–24, suspension rates were under 1% in 42% of schools), smaller schools offer less precise estimates. For example, a small school may report zero suspensions in a given year. However, this does not necessarily indicate that the school never suspends students. It may simply be that, due to its small size, it did not happen to enroll any students who they would have suspended. Had the school enrolled a student who was suspended at another school, it might also have chosen to suspend that student. Thus, the reported suspension rate of a small school in a given year is a less precise reflection of the school's tendency to suspend students. In our main model, we cluster standard errors by school, but this does not take school size into account.

In this section, we present results from the same analyses in our main model but add analytic weights to account for total enrollment. This adjustment accounts for heteroskedasticity in the data where smaller schools offer less precise estimates. Weighting for precision will adjust both point estimates and standard errors, as smaller schools will contribute less to the average estimates. Table B3 and Table B4 compare results with and without weight by student group and school type, respectively. As shown in both tables, the coefficients are all in the same direction, suggesting that the impact of CCSPP on suspension rates is generally robust. However, the magnitude of the coefficients is generally smaller, and results also lose significance in the weighted models.

Table B3. Suspension Results by Student Group, With and Without Weights

	All students		Black students		Hispanic students		English learners		SES disadvantaged	
Statistic	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted
CCSPP	-0.520*	-0.099	-1.804	-1.190	-0.485+	-0.037	-0.576*	-0.019	-0.575*	-0.150
Standard error	(0.25)	(0.22)	(1.09)	(1.16)	(0.27)	(0.23)	(0.28)	(0.29)	(0.26)	(0.22)
N	1,704	1,704	448	448	1,671	1,671	1,548	1,548	1,704	1,704
R-squared	0.07	0.06	0.14	0.12	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.04	0.07	0.05

Notes: ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Coefficients displayed in figure are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Table B4. Suspension Results by School Type, With and Without Weights

Statistic	All students		Elementary schools		Middle/High schools		Small schools		Medium/Large schools	
	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted	Not weighted	Weighted
CCSPP	-0.520*	-0.099	-0.336+	-0.118	-1.289+	-0.180	-1.165*	-0.816+	0.000	0.186
Standard error	(0.25)	(0.22)	(0.19)	(0.20)	(0.69)	(0.46)	(0.53)	(0.47)	(0.22)	(0.24)
N	1,704	1,704	1,121	1,121	536	536	732	732	972	972
R-squared	0.07	0.06	0.05	0.05	0.13	0.09	0.11	0.10	0.07	0.06

Notes: ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. Coefficients are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition). Heteroskedasticity-robust standard errors are clustered at the school level.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

Robustness of Suspension Results to Alternative Modeling Approaches

In our main analyses, we utilized linear regression in our difference-in-differences estimations, which is suitable for normally distributed data and offers easily interpretable results. In this section, we present results on suspension rates generated using negative binomial regression. This type of regression is suitable for data that are overdispersed, where the variance is significantly greater than the mean. In our matched sample, the variance in suspension rates is 26.7, more than 7 times larger than the mean of 3.7. Thus, negative binomial regression models would better fit our data and reduce bias in estimates. The outcome variable in a negative binomial regression is in count format, in our case the number of suspensions that occurred at the school. We include total enrollment as the exposure variable since larger schools are likely to have more suspensions because they have more students. As shown in Table B5, the coefficients (incidence rate ratios) for CCSPP are all below 1, indicating similar findings from our main analyses where treated schools see a greater reduction in suspension rates compared to matched comparison schools. The negative binomial models failed to converge for certain student groups and school types, limiting our ability to estimate alternative specifications across all analyses.

Table B5. CCSPP Impacts on Suspension Rates, Negative Binomial Regression

Statistic	All students	Hispanic students	English learners	SES disadvantaged	Middle/High schools	Small schools
CCSPP	0.957	0.953	0.901+	0.911*	0.911	0.861
Standard error	(0.055)	(0.055)	(0.064)	(0.043)	(0.076)	(0.090)
N	1,596	1,557	1,372	1,593	515	630

Notes: ** p <0.01, * p <0.05, + p <0.10. CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. SES = socioeconomic status. Coefficients are displayed in incidence rate ratios; a ratio that is below 1 indicates that the change in incidence rates of suspensions in treated schools is greater than that in matched comparison schools. Coefficients are from fully specified models that include school fixed effects, year fixed effects, and controls for school characteristics (enrollment, percentage of unduplicated pupils, homeless, English learners, foster youth, and racial/ethnic composition).

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

School-Specific Linear Trends Check

The results with school-specific linear trends are qualitatively similar to those from the primary model, with treatment effect estimates of comparable magnitude and direction. However, the estimates are less consistently statistically significant due to the substantial reduction in statistical precision that occurs when estimating individual linear trends for each school. This loss of precision stems from both the large number of additional parameters being estimated (one trend parameter per school) and the resulting standard error inflation, which is typical when including unit-specific trends in difference-in-differences models with limited post-treatment periods. The similarity in point estimates across specifications provides reassurance that the primary results are not driven by differential pre-treatment trends, while the reduced precision highlights the efficiency gains from the more parsimonious primary specification.

Additional Limitations

Our use of school-level data introduces additional limitations related to student composition and unobserved sorting patterns. Even with comparable observable characteristics—such as matching schools on unduplicated pupil count (UPC) percentages—we cannot rule out systematic differences in unobserved student or family characteristics between treatment and comparison schools. For example, schools with identical UPC percentages might experience different patterns of student mobility, with one school attracting more socioeconomically disadvantaged students from highly engaged families while losing students from less-engaged families. These unobserved compositional shifts could influence outcome trajectories independent of the CCSPP intervention.

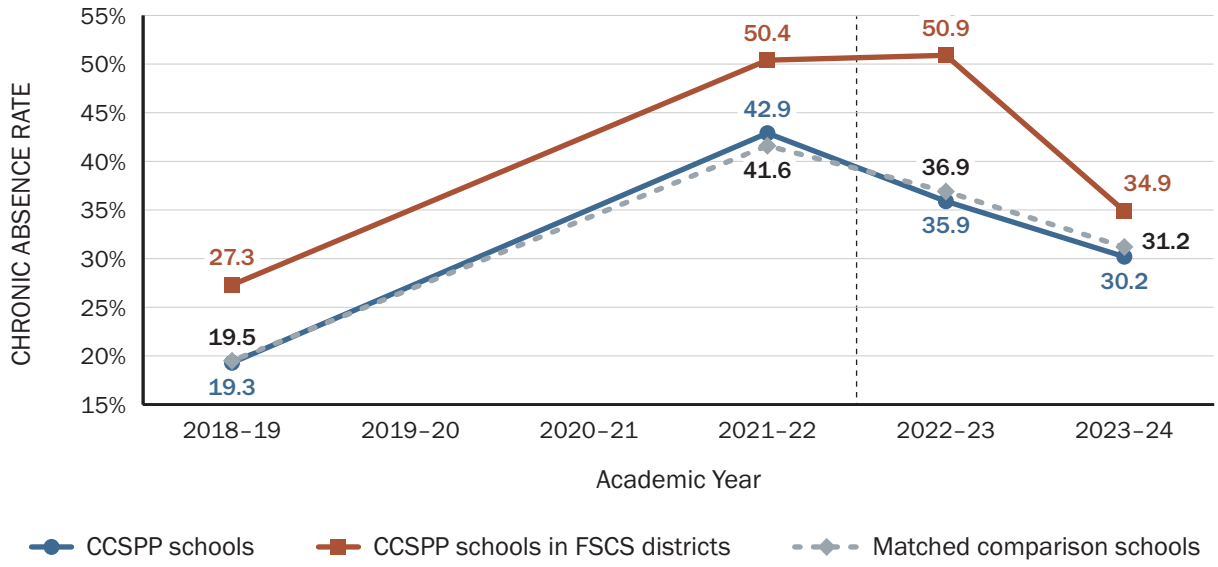
Additionally, while we have attempted to account for known concurrent educational initiatives, we cannot completely eliminate the possibility of overlapping treatments affecting our results, though it would be unlikely for such interventions to systematically target our treatment schools while missing matched comparison schools. Finally, despite rigorous propensity score matching and multiple model specifications, it remains difficult to conclusively rule out selection effects, wherein unmeasured school or community

characteristics associated with both CCSPP participation and outcome trajectories may influence the observed results. Schools and districts that successfully applied for and received CCSPP implementation grants may possess underlying organizational capacities, leadership qualities, or community assets that would have contributed to divergent outcomes even in the absence of grant funding. While our models include controls for observable school characteristics and fixed effects to account for time-invariant unobserved factors, the possibility of time-varying unobserved characteristics influencing both selection and outcomes remains an inherent limitation of this quasi-experimental design.

Appendix C: Attendance Patterns in Full-Service Community Schools Districts and CCSPP Schools

Chronic absence rates in California Community Schools Partnership Program (CCSPP) schools in experienced Full-Service Community Schools (FSCS) districts, which are disproportionately in large urban districts, experienced distinct patterns of recovery postpandemic. While still elevated compared to prepandemic levels in 2023, Cohort 1 grantees in FSCS districts recovered more rapidly than both matched comparison schools with similar demographic profiles and CCSPP grantees in non-FSCS districts. By spring 2024, chronic absence rates in experienced community school districts had decreased by an average of 16 percentage points from late peak pandemic levels, compared to a 10.4 percentage point reduction in comparison schools and 12.5 in new CCSPP schools. This accelerated recovery pattern suggests that established community schools infrastructures may provide advantages in reengaging students following disruptions—likely through their integrated approach to addressing barriers to attendance and their established connections with families and communities.

Figure C1. Chronic Absence Trends by Full-Service Community Schools and CCSPP Status



Note: FSCS = Full-Service Community Schools program. CCSPP = California Community Schools Partnership Program. The vertical line indicates the dispersal of CCSPP implementation funds.

Source: Learning Policy Institute analysis of 2017–18 to 2023–24 data from the California Department of Education Downloadable Data Files and the California Assessment of Student Performance and Progress Research Files.

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